

"...they add so much to our community, exposing our local students to cultures they had no idea were different from theirs. I love these students as much as my own. They steal my heart, and never give it back. I love when they come back to visit and hearing about their accomplishments and what they are doing with their lives as adults."

- Host parent of a YES student

"The YES program was the best thing that happened to my daughter. I can tell how much she changed - she became more responsible and mature. She had the opportunity to explore another culture by living with a host family, experiencing a typical American teenager life. YES not only helped her to grow as a young adult, but also I can see how American culture feels. Parents are concerned about the safety of their child in an unknown family overseas, but the host families and staff from YES and American Councils are extremely supportive."

- Parent of a YES student

"I will never forget this year full of experience, especially my amazing host family...They met me not as a stranger, but with a smile on their faces. I am one of the happiest people in the world, because I have another MOM in addition to my natural MOM. I am really grateful for YES and U.S. State Department for giving me this chance."

- YES alumna

**For more information, contact the American Councils office in your home country:**

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## WHAT IS THE YES PROGRAM?

The Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study (YES) was established by Congress in October 2002 in response to the events of September 11, 2001, then-U.S. YES is fully funded by the United States government and administered by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) of the U.S. Department of State. The program provides competitively selected secondary school students with a scholarship to spend a year living in the U.S. with a volunteer host family, attending a U.S. high school to foster understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries around the world.

The YES program is supported at the local level by thousands of U.S. citizens and local secondary schools that host, educate, and support students with no financial compensation.

Now in its 16th year, the YES academic year program has provided scholarships to thousands of secondary school students from many countries. More than 590 students from Southeast Europe have taken part in YES so far. In 2019-20, 81 students from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Kosovo, and North Macedonia are studying in the U.S. on the YES program.

## WHO ORGANIZES THE PROGRAM?

American Councils for International Education organizes recruitment, selection, orientation, and travel arrangements for the YES program in Southeast Europe. Founded in 1974, American Councils is an international non-profit organization working to improve mutual understanding between countries, exchange ideas among individuals, and enhance collaboration through education. For over 40 years, American Councils has been designing, implementing, and supporting innovative programs in the United States, Europe, Eurasia, the Middle East, Asia, and Africa for tens of thousands of participants. These include several U.S. government programs for secondary school students (besides YES), university and graduate students, teachers, and professors. Many other private, non-profit organizations in the United States also support the YES program. The U.S. government has asked these organizations to place YES participants in supportive U.S. host families and to organize local activities during the year-long program.

## WHAT DOES THE SCHOLARSHIP PROVIDE?

The YES scholarship provides the following:

- Round-trip domestic and international travel (from home to the United States and back)
- Monthly allowance to help students participate in social activities and buy necessary personal supplies
- Placement with a selected and screened U.S. host family for one year
- Enrollment in a U.S. secondary school
- Program orientation activities including pre-program preparation and re-entry preparation
- Program activities arranged in local U.S. communities
- Medical insurance, excluding pre-existing conditions and dental care

## WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO APPLY TO THE PROGRAM?

The YES scholarship competition is merit-based and open, at no cost, to applicants who meet the following requirements. Students with disabilities are invited to participate in the competition. YES finalists include students with disabilities each year. Selected students with disabilities meet the same criteria as other participants in the program. Students may only apply once to the program during a given recruitment cycle.

### Eligible applicants must:

1. Meet the grade/age requirements set for their country (refer to the table)
2. Be enrolled in a secondary school at the time of application
3. Have an academic standing of good or better
4. Have previously studied English and demonstrate English language ability at the time of registration
5. Meet U.S. visa eligibility requirements
6. Be a citizen of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Kosovo, and Macedonia and be able to receive an international passport in the country where they apply to the program.



## PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY (BY COUNTRY)

COUNTRY	Eligible Grades*	Eligible Birthdate Range	Completed Secondary Education or Graduated Prior to Program Start Date
Albania	10 and 11	January 1, 2003 - July 15, 2005	No
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1 and 2	January 1, 2003 - July 15, 2005	No
Bulgaria	9 and 10	January 1, 2003 - July 15, 2005	No
Kosovo	10 and 11	January 1, 2003 - July 15, 2005	No
North Macedonia	1 and 2	January 1, 2003 - July 15, 2005	No

\* Students in their final grade of school who are required to complete military service are not eligible.

NOTE: Students who change their grade level to an ineligible grade before their departure to the U.S. will be disqualified.

## WHO IS *NOT* ELIGIBLE?

Students are **ineligible** to apply if:

- S/he does not meet criteria 1-6 (at left)
- S/he has stayed in the United States for more than ninety (90) days in total during the past five (5) years.
- His/her family (or member of family):
  - Applied or is applying to emigrate to the U.S.
  - Made plans to emigrate or has already emigrated to the U.S.

## WHAT IS *NOT* PROVIDED?

The YES scholarship does **NOT** cover the following costs:

- Any costs associated with receiving an international passport.
- Personal expenses not covered by the monthly stipend.
- Excess baggage costs, phone bills, or internet use.

## HOW DOES THE TESTING AND SELECTION PROCESS WORK?

Students compete in several rounds of competition. At the semi-finalist stage, students and their parents are invited to attend an informational meeting to learn more about the program. Students then take part in an individual interview with American Councils staff, take a standardized test of English, write two more proctored essays, and receive the official program application, which is due to the local American Councils office within two weeks.

Selection will be based on merit and demonstrated preparedness for a year-long exchange experience as evidenced in students' comprehensive applications. English-language proficiency is important, but it is not the sole element in selection. Students also will be required to provide medical evaluations and be certified as medically fit to participate in the program.

The selection process will be completed in spring, and all applicants will receive notification of their status by mid-May. Selected finalists will attend a predeparture orientation in their home country in June-July and travel to the U.S. in July-August. Students return home the following May-June. YES students must return to their home country at the end of the program, on the date assigned by American Councils. The U.S. visa issued for program participants will not be amended or extended beyond the program end date for any reason.

## HOW WILL I BENEFIT FROM THE EXCHANGE EXPERIENCE?

The YES program offers students an opportunity to learn about the people and culture of the United States. YES participants are also young ambassadors who teach Americans about the people and culture of their countries. Students gain an appreciation for and develop sensitivity to other cultures, experience personal growth and independence, and become better prepared for an increasingly interdependent world. Students form strong ties with their American host families and U.S. communities, building relationships that often last a lifetime. Many alumni attend prestigious universities upon their return home, and later find exciting jobs that use skills learned during their stay in the United States.

## WHAT SHOULD I CONSIDER BEFORE APPLYING TO YES?

Students who are interested in this program should consider the possible negative effects of this program:

- Will I have to repeat a year of school after returning home?
- Will I be home too late to take final school examinations/university/institute entrance examinations? YES students return to their communities in late May and June.
- Will my university or institute defer my admission if I have already been accepted?
- Will I be required to serve in the military upon return?
- Will I be eligible to graduate with honors/receive a gold medal at my home school?

Finally, although students attend a U.S. high school, the curriculum is substantially different from that in other countries, and likely you will not learn the same subject material.