For more detailed information on these and other questions, please refer to the *Student Handbook* and *Natural Parent Information Guide*.

**What are my chances of being selected as a finalist?**

It is difficult to calculate or predict because this is a merit-based competition, which means the candidate with the strongest application is selected.

**How much will your participation cost?**

The only costs to you are those for sending documents to our office, fees for acquiring an international passport, fees for required medical follow-up, and the cost of a notarized document giving permission for an underage youth to leave the country. Additionally, we invite those who become finalists/alternates and their parents to attend an informational meeting in select cities. Should you decide to attend this meeting, you will need to pay for your own transportation. While students are in the U.S., they will be responsible for expenses in excess of their monthly stipend. Students should also be aware that they will need to pay for the cost of telephone calls home, excess baggage and e-mail/internet/mobile phone use (if available).

**What if my citizenship is different from this country (e.g., Cameroonian living in Kuwait; Moroccan living in Tunisia; etc.)?**

You must be able to receive an international passport from the country in which you are/were tested. You will need to obtain your international passport in early spring. Please speak to a program representative separately.

**What are American HFs like?**

Host families are as diverse as the United States itself. They can be two-parent families with children, single parents (with or without children), a married couple without children, etc. It is important to keep in mind that a student’s host family may be very different from his/her own natural family. Experienced placement organizations carefully choose HFs with the hope of finding a compatible match. They are selected with the information on the student’s application in mind. However, if a student writes on his/her application that they like computers or playing the piano, for example, this does not necessarily mean that the placement organization will find a HF with a home computer or a piano. HFs on this program host as volunteers and receive no payment.

**How are HFs chosen?**

Host families, like students, go through an application process, which requires a completed application, in-home interview, a background check and references. They also attend orientations before the student arrives to prepare for their hosting experience.

**Why do HFs host students?**

There are as many different reasons why a host family decides to host as there are host families. Some HFs might be interested in learning about the exchange student’s home country. Others might have had a previous experience hosting foreign exchange students and wish to do it again. Perhaps a member of the HF might have been an exchange student him or herself. Every HF has their own reason.

**Can I work?**

The exchange visa given to participants of this program does not allow formal employment, however occasional informal jobs such as babysitting, private tutoring, or yard work are allowed.

**Can I choose my HF or placement location?**

No. Students are placed all over the U.S., including Alaska and Hawaii. Some students will live on farms or in small towns; others will live closer to large cities, but not necessarily in large cities like NYC or Los Angeles. Even if you know of an American family who is interested in hosting you, the placement organization will most likely find a different family for you. One of many goals of the program is to provide new experiences and different views on lifestyles in the U.S.

**If I don’t like my HF, can I move to another host family?**

Students are expected to adjust to their host family and to try to fit in as well as possible. The placement organization may decide that changing a family is necessary, but only after considerable effort has been made to adapt to the HF and new environment. Host families are not changed simply because a student would like to live in a bigger city, attend another school, does not like the climate in a particular area, or would like to have a host sibling of the same age.

**We are concerned about crime, drugs, and danger in the U.S. Is it dangerous?**

HFs will take responsibility for their student's well-being. HFs will help students stay safe by teaching them about safety issues in the U.S. Students should exercise caution and common sense as they would in their own home town.

**What if there is a family emergency at home?**

All parties (student, HF, placement organization, natural family, ECA, American Councils) will work together to determine if the student should return home. If approved by ECA, the program will pay for the student’s travel home.

**Can natural parents visit?**

Visits from natural parents are discouraged because they disrupt the HF/student relationship, overall adjustment process, and exchange experience. Natural parents may visit only if given written permission from the placement organization and the HF. Should the NPs be allowed to visit, please note that the HF is not expected to host or pay for any aspect of the NPs’ visit.

**What if I get sick?**

Comprehensive health and accident insurance will be provided for all students. Students will have access to medical care to cover illness, which occurs during their stay in the U.S. This insurance does not cover pre-existing conditions or any chronic conditions that might occur while on program. Dental insurance is NOT provided.

**What if I want to return home before the program is over?**

We expect that all students applying for this program plan to remain on the program for the entire academic year. It is possible to return home early, but placement organizations will first do everything to help the student make the right decision. If you decide to quit the program and go home, you will not be permitted to return to the U.S. on the program.

**Do I get school credit here for my year in the U.S.?**

This decision will be made by the student's school authorities at home and should be discussed with them prior to participation on the secondary school program. For the most part, students will not get credit for their year in the U.S. since our systems of education differ. Students may need to repeat their year upon return. Again, it is important to discuss this with your school ahead of time.

**Will students in their last year of high school graduate while abroad if not at home?**

Once again, this decision will be made by the student’s school authorities at home. Students should discuss this with their school director prior to participation on the secondary school program.

**What classes will I take?**

You may meet with your U.S. school counselor on your first day of school to determine in which grade and which classes you will study. You will have mandatory classes, such as U.S. history and English literature, depending on your school. Then you will have electives; courses which you can choose yourself. The types of courses offered differ from school to school, but high schools in the U.S. by and large offer a large variety of courses to take. Your school counselor will help you choose which ones will be best for you.

**Can I graduate from a U.S. high school?**

No. In general, diplomas are not given to foreign exchange students who only study in the host school for one year. It is also important to note that U.S. diplomas are likely not recognized by institutions of higher learning in your country.

**Can I continue my studies in the U.S. after the program ends?**

No. The program requires that you return to your home country at the end of the program on the date assigned to you. The visa on which you will travel to the U.S. (J-1) also requires that you remain in your home country for two years after returning. However, all U.S. visa questions should be addressed to your U.S. Embassy or Consulate, as American Councils is not responsible for the U.S. visa beyond helping students with processing. The two-year home-stay requirement is part of the J-1 visa.

**Can I bring or send back some of my stipend?**

The amount of money you will receive is calculated to give you enough to pay for your expenses while in the U.S. Your American family and friends will expect you to use your allowance to participate in social and cultural activities. It is also intended to pay for your personal items (e.g., shampoo, deodorant) as well as telephone calls, postage, class trips, etc.

**How can my parents contact me after I am in the U.S.?**

American Councils staff is available to assist parents with their inquiries and in emergencies via phone and/or email. Students will also need to make arrangements with their host families to determine how often they can be in contact with their natural parents. We recommend that phone/skype calls be limited to once or twice a month. Students may e-mail their natural parents more often, but they must consult with their host families first to learn what their rules are about internet/computer/phone use.

**Can I travel on my own?**

You must be accompanied by an adult and obtain written permission from the HF, placement organization, and natural parents in order to travel.

**How much clothing can I take with me?**

No more than what can fit in one suitcase and be within the airline overweight baggage limits. Finalists will receive packing suggestions before leaving.

**Do I need to bring gifts for my HF? If so, what?**

HFs will appreciate small tokens which represent your town or region. Expensive gifts are not appropriate or expected. Keep in mind that students are not allowed to bring alcohol as a gift nor are knives considered appropriate by American families.

**Do I need to be vaccinated to participate on the 2022-23 program?**

You do not need to be vaccinated against COVID-19 to apply to the YES program. The U.S. government recently announced that all foreign citizens are required to be fully immunised against COVID-19 in order to enter the United States starting in November 2021. (American Councils will update YES Organizations on how this will affect exchange students as soon as more information is known.)