



OUTCOME ASSESSMENT OF THE AMERICAN COUNCIL OF YOUNG POLITICAL LEADERS (ACYPL) PROGRAM

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MARCH 2002

Submitted to:

**U.S. Department of State
Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs
Office of Policy and Evaluation**

Prepared by:

**American Institutes for Research
Washington, D.C.**



Project Information

The ACYPL outcome assessment was conducted by the American Institutes for Research (AIR), a non-profit research and consulting firm, from September 2000 to March 2002. Data collection took place in nine countries, Australia, China, El Salvador, India, Israel, Mexico, Poland, South Africa, and the United States, with four countries (Australia, China, South Africa, and the United States) selected for in-depth case studies. Data were gathered through a survey of 357 alumni who participated from 1989 to 1999, focus groups with 1989–1999 alumni in the four case study countries, pre- and post-program surveys with two ACYPL delegations from 2001, and interviews with ACYPL program administrators and/or U.S. Embassy officials in the four case study countries. The survey response rate was 48 percent.

Program Information

Since 1966 the American Council of Young Political Leaders (ACYPL) program has sent more than 6,000 promising young political leaders between the ages of 25 and 40 from the United States and around the world to over 90 different countries on two-week professional exchanges. One of several exchange programs to come out of the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961—Fulbright-Hays Act, the ACYPL exchange experience is designed to give foreign delegations visiting the United States the chance to gain a broad understanding of the U.S. political system, institutions, and economy, as well as to learn about the culture and values of the American people. As a reciprocal exchange, U.S. delegations traveling abroad have the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the relationship between the United States and the hosting country and to share information about the United States with key overseas audiences while forming valuable ties with their professional and political peers abroad. Most important, the ACYPL program is designed to help facilitate dialogue and understanding among young political leaders from around the world and to provide a forum conducive to open dialogue, mutual understanding, and the forging of long-lasting ties.

Contact Information

For more information about the ACYPL outcome assessment, please contact the Office of Policy and Evaluation at (202) 632-6325, by email at ECAevaluation@state.gov, or by mail at State Annex 5, 2200 C Street NW, Washington, DC 20037.

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The purpose of the American Council of Young Political Leaders (ACYPL) program outcome assessment was to provide the U.S. Department of State with impact data that allows it to assess the effectiveness of the program in meeting its legislative mandate. This mandate includes imparting information about the United States to key overseas audiences and enhancing their knowledge of American political institutions, processes, and values, as well as enhancing American young political leaders' knowledge and understanding of political institutions, processes, and values abroad. A secondary purpose of the assessment was to evaluate the current state of the alumni record-keeping system to provide the U.S. Department of State and the ACYPL organization with specific recommendations to improve contact and career information on U.S. and foreign alumni.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF THE PROGRAM

- 98% of program alumni reported agreeing or strongly agreeing that the program helped them gain a greater understanding of the host country's political issues. In regard to economic issues, and social and cultural issues, these numbers were 92% and 95%, respectively.
- Alumni also reported agreeing or strongly agreeing that the program helped them gain a deeper understanding of international issues in general (89%); develop greater tolerance for alternative opinions or operating procedures (81%); heighten their awareness of social and cultural diversity among different nations (87%); and acquire skills to enhance their professional development (83%).
- 91% of alumni reported that their host country contacts had at least "some" impact in enhancing their overall understanding of the host country, its institutions, and its people. Of these alumni, 49% reported that their host country contacts had a "significant" impact in enhancing their overall understanding of the host country, its institutions, and its people.
- 81% of alumni reported that the ACYPL program was valuable or extremely valuable for their professional development and career growth.
- 73% of alumni reported being extremely satisfied with their ACYPL program experience.

INITIAL PROGRAM OUTCOMES

- ◆ ACYPL alumni's interest in foreign affairs increased significantly after their participation in the program, going from "moderate" (25%) before their program to "substantial" (72%) after their program.
- ◆ ACYPL alumni's interest in the host country also increased significantly after their participation in the program, going from "moderate" (30%) before their program to "substantial" (78%) after their program.
- ◆ Participants' knowledge of the host country's institutions was significantly higher immediately after the ACYPL program than before. In the areas of politics, economy, and culture, program participants rated their knowledge before the program at an average of about 2.5 (on a scale from

1 to 5, with 1 being “no knowledge” and 5 being “expertise”). After the program, they reported an average around 4.0 on the same scale. This heightened knowledge level remained stable over time.

- ◆ 70% of alumni reported establishing at least one host country contact during their ACYPL program, and 20% reported establishing at least seven host country contacts.
- ◆ 93% of alumni reported establishing at least one contact with other members of their delegation, and 28% reported establishing seven or more contacts with delegation members.

INTERMEDIATE PROGRAM OUTCOMES

- ◆ Although nearly 50% of respondents reported initially making three or more host country contacts during their country visit, only 27% reported being in touch with at least this many contacts at the time of the study.
- ◆ 63% of alumni are still in touch with at least one of their host country contacts. Of these alumni, 80% reported staying in touch yearly or less with their host country contacts.
- ◆ 58% of alumni reported that host country contacts sparked collaboration on work-related projects at least to “some” extent, and 66% reported that delegation contacts sparked collaboration on work-related projects at least to “some” extent.
- ◆ 98% of alumni reported sharing information on some aspect of their host country with members of their home community, and 99% reported sharing information with family members and friends. All alumni reported sharing information about their host country with professional colleagues.
- ◆ 89% of alumni rated the importance of the information obtained from ACYPL “moderate” or higher for their professional career.
- ◆ 41% of alumni reported legislating or enacting policies that were partly influenced by what they learned in the ACYPL program.

LONG-TERM PROGRAM OUTCOMES

- ◆ Program administrators indicated that the ACYPL program promotes the development of democracies abroad by showing foreign delegates the American example of open political systems, respect for human rights, and other democratic practices.
- ◆ Several program administrators indicated that the program is successful in promoting democracy abroad by bringing together member of parties that have been traditionally at odds with one another.
- ◆ Alumni reported that improving their understanding of the host country’s issues, increasing their tolerance, and heightening their awareness of diversity were the most successful outcomes of the ACYPL program.
- ◆ Alumni most often reported that their long-term international linkages helped them inform their colleagues and community about foreign issues (75%) and learn about useful practices from overseas (65%).
- ◆ Despite the overall satisfaction expressed, alumni indicated that although the political components of the program were adequate, the exchange lacked opportunities to touch on other cultural, economic, and social issues.
- ◆ 90% of alumni expressed that they had an impact on host country counterparts.
- ◆ Since their ACYPL exchange, 96% of alumni reported seeking out news about their host country and 53% reported taking up the study of the host country out of personal interest as ways to sustain their knowledge of the host country.

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- ◆ 69% of alumni reported remaining involved with the ACYPL program since their country visit. Of the 31% of alumni who reported that they have not remained involved, the most frequent reason given was that they were unaware of opportunities to stay involved
 - ◆ The most common means for alumni to remain involved with ACYPL was by regularly reading the alumni newsletter (94%). Also common were hosting visiting delegations (84%), nominating others to the program (78%), and attending alumni events (74%).

CONCLUSIONS

The ACYPL program **promotes the U.S. Department of State's foreign policy objectives and strategic goals**. In particular, the two strategic goals most extensively discussed during the ACYPL exchange were democracy and international relations/mutual understanding. Furthermore, the program **promotes mutual understanding** between the people of the United States and people abroad by showing delegates different political systems, giving them **an opportunity to form long-lasting bonds** with international peers, and **increasing their understanding** of the host country and international issues.

The program is **effective in creating professional linkages** and improving mutual understanding between members of delegations and between delegates and their counterparts from the host country. The program also **largely contributes to the professional development of delegates and alumni** by giving them an opportunity to establish and maintain professional and institutional linkages abroad. Finally, the program's various meetings, events, and activities **provide delegates with in-depth exposure to the host country's politics**, and to a lesser extent to its economy, culture, and social issues.

Some **differences exist between U.S. and foreign alumni** on their ACYPL program expectations and experiences. Among key differences, foreign alumni reported being more interested and knowledgeable about the host country prior to the program. After the program, foreign alumni were significantly more likely to engage in activities related to the host country, and they also reported greater professional benefits from the program than U.S. alumni.

Prominent compared with less prominent alumni reported notable differences about their ACYPL program experiences. Among these differences, prominent alumni approached the ACYPL program with a greater level of interest in the host country than did their less prominent counterparts. After participating in the ACYPL program, prominent alumni were also more likely to engage in activities related to the host country and report that their delegation contacts sparked collaboration on work-related projects and that they had legislated policies that were partly influenced by what they had learned in the ACYPL program.

Program administrators and alumni are generally satisfied with how the ACYPL organization meets their needs, although they believe that **some aspects of the program could be strengthened**. Specifically, there is a need for more economic, cultural, and social activities and discussions. Some alumni mentioned that the exchange should be more tailored to the host country's interests and therefore touch on issues specific to the host country. Alumni also commonly mentioned that the program's busy schedule did not give delegates enough free time to explore the host country on their own.

The ACYPL program **would benefit from developing a centralized database for alumni tracking** that would allow alumni to remain more involved. Although alumni expressed great interest in remaining actively involved with the ACYPL program, many reported being unaware of opportunities to stay involved owing to the lack of established alumni organizations, and lack of contact from an alumni organization or from the program organization in the U.S. and/or overseas.

HIGHLIGHTS OF ALUMNI FEEDBACK ON ACYPL

"Superb! One of the best, most educational experiences of my life!"

"You Americans have done it again: you have brought us together and made us talk to each other."

"You guys were the ones responsible for making friends of former foes."

"One of the most valuable parts of the program was spending 16 days with other young political leaders in an atmosphere where there is no competition and we can find out more about what we have in common."

"I believe that ACYPL is a most important program that makes young political leaders from different countries know each other, learn about one another, and exchange knowledge. It also makes strong connections and friendships for the future...The program made me learn a lot about the host country. It showed me how important the connection and friendship between Israel and the U.S. is, and overall, how important the friendship between young leaders from different countries is."

"I found the program to be very informative and opportunities provided to gain a vast array of knowledge of the workings of the American political system were immense...It is still amazing to me to consider the doors that were opened up to us during our entire visit."

"It is a great experience, giving me a lot of information that we can't get from any other source because having this human to human meeting can give more than any other book or TV program."

"This is an excellent and, in my opinion, extremely important program. It exposed me to the U.S. in a way that I would never have been able to."

"This program exceeded all my expectations. The access we were given, the candid replies to questions, and the breadth of the program were tremendous."

"This program was very interesting, a little strenuous, and very professionally executed. I understand the American political system now much better than before. The program was both educational and enjoyable."