

EVALUATION SUMMARY



Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs Office of Policy and Evaluation

Community Connections Program

The purpose of the evaluation was to document the outcomes and impact of the Community Connections Program and to assess the degree to which it has been successful in exposing Eurasian entrepreneurs, local government officials, legal professionals, and non-governmental organization leaders to the institutions and challenges of a democratic free-market society. The evaluation also explored the extent to which the program promotes mutual understanding thereby and contributes to economic and democratic reform in Eurasia.

Key Findings

- **Many participants, after exposure to the United States, assess its institutions more positively**
 - Alumni attitudes toward the rule of law, freedom of speech, democracy, and a market economy all improved as a result of the program (46%, 43%, 48%, and 62%, respectively).
 - Alumni attitudes toward key U.S. social institutions and values, including ethnic diversity, religious institutions, volunteer organizations, and the role of the individual in society all improved (55%, 49%, 65%, and 51%, respectively.)
- **Community Connections had a positive effect on participants' firms or careers**
 - One half of the alumni reported that the fiscal health of their firms had improved as a direct result of the contacts or information gained in the program. Among those not heading firms or organizations at the time of the exchange, 62% said their employment status had improved, 25% said the nature and scope of their work had expanded, and 24% were working more hours. 98% agreed that supervisors should adopt a more democratic management style—taking the opinions of their subordinates into account when making decisions.
- **Participants are inspired to implement change in their home countries**
 - Alumni have a continuing and positive impact on their home communities via workshops, seminars, medical clinics, free legal services, new schools and parent-teacher organizations, centers for public policy, and other innovations. Alumni trace these contributions to skills or knowledge acquired in the United States.
- **Community Connections extends a change orientation to numerous beneficiaries**
 - Alumni report on average that their innovations and activities on average benefit 36 others in their home communities. Extrapolating to all 11,514 alumni, over 400 *thousand* co-workers, superiors, professional colleagues, government officials, and youth have been affected by the program.

Project Information: Lehman Surveys & Research collected data for this evaluation from March through August 2002 in Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, and Kazakhstan. Structured face-to-face interviews were administered to 5,429 alumni, who participated in the program from 1994 through the first half of 2002. One hundred twenty alumni also participated in 16 follow-up focus group discussions held in 11 cities in May and June of 2003 to confirm data, to elicit both anticipated and, especially, unanticipated outcomes of the program, and strategies for improvement.

Program Information: The Community Connections Program brings competitively selected professionals from Eurasia to the U.S. for internships in local American communities and businesses and organizations. The goals of this program are to: expose participants to a democratic free-market society; encourage both the implementation of change and the building of public-private partnerships in their home countries; and to create linkages between the host community and the participants' home community.

Contact Information: For more information regarding this evaluation, or to request a copy of the report, please contact the Office of Policy and Evaluation at (202) 632-6325, email ecaevaluation@state.gov, or by mail to State Annex 5, 2200 C Street NW, Washington, DC 20522-0505. Additional program information may be found at <http://exchanges.state.gov>.