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EVALUATION REPORT

Congress–Bundestag Youth Exchange

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EVALUATION



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DISCLAIMER

The authors' views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Department of State or the United States Government.

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ACRONYMS

CBYX	Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange
CBYXAA	Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange Alumni Association
DOS	U.S. Department of State
ECA	Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs
EQ	Evaluation Question
IP	Implementing Partner(s)
MELI	Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning, and Innovation Unit at ECA
USG	U.S. Government

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This evaluation utilized a mixed-method design to analyze the experiences of American participants and American communities that hosted German participants of the Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange (CBYX) program from the inaugural year of 1984 to 2018.¹ Researchers conducted a total of 13 focus groups with 47 participants representing American CBYX alumni and host families and host school representatives of German CBYX participants.² Moreover, research conducted 39 individual in-depth interviews with American CBYX alumni; and 30 total in-depth interviews with 21 host family members and nine school representatives who hosted German CBYX participants. Additionally, 1,915 CBYX alumni and host community members (host families, host school representatives) participated in an online survey.

Across the focus groups, in-depth interviews, and survey components of this evaluation, findings are consistent. Participants across cohorts and program years shared similar feedback, experiences, and outcomes. Unless otherwise specified, the analysis in this report is overarching. The following are among the key findings from the evaluation:

- **The evaluation finds that the CBYX program has long-lasting positive impacts on American participants and the U.S. communities that hosted German participants.** These impacts affected the personal and professional lives of alumni and served to enrich both the participants and the host communities by increasing cross-cultural awareness, expanding worldviews, and bringing new ideas and perspectives as well as openness to and curiosity about cultures other than their own.
- **American CBYX alumni reported experiencing personal growth as a result of participation in the program principally in the areas of 1) self-confidence, 2) ability to communicate with people from other cultures, and 3) ability to adapt to challenging circumstances.** Alumni described being able to leverage this growth to

1. This includes the group of participants that began the CBYX program in 2018 and ended in 2019.

2. Host schools include high schools, community colleges, four-year universities, and technical schools that high school and young professional German CBYX participants have attended. The German side of the CBYX program does not include a vocational component. Host school representatives are faculty from these schools that manage student exchange programs, including the CBYX program, which includes setting up host families and acting as counselors for incoming exchange students.

successfully navigate personal and professional relationships as well as their career and academic paths after the program.

- Moreover, alumni report utilizing skills such as German language skills, program management, and teaching in their professional careers after completing the program. Young professional and vocational alumni can leverage their work experience from professional placements in Germany to launch or advance in existing careers after finishing the program.

- **Alumni reported broadening their worldview as a result of participation in the program,** largely due to being exposed to the German culture as well as new political, social, and educational systems different from their own. Serving as American ambassadors in Germany made American students prouder of the society they represent and more appreciative of the career opportunities and personal freedoms granted to them in the United States. Alumni also highlighted a number of aspects of the German culture that they admire, including
 - personal independence;
 - a high level of responsibility given to young people;
 - broad knowledge about world affairs and traditions to discuss politics, and;
 - the high level of knowledge and maturity young people in Germany have about international relations and global issues.
- **Many alumni who participated in focus groups and interviews, as well as 88 percent of survey respondents, believe that they would not be where they are now academically or professionally had they not participated in the program.** Some discovered a new career interest and decided to pursue it after the program ended, either through their internships or other experiences they had while in Germany. For other participants, their experiences in the program reinforced previous career interests and/or it helped them to determine new pathways or methods for achieving career goals.
- **Alumni reported maintaining some connection to Germany or the German language after the program ended,** through German friends made during the program (often host family members), the use of the German language professionally, or residing in Germany for school or work. That said, the use of German language skills and personal and professional connections to Germany varied widely from currently living and working in the country to speaking with friends and host family members from Germany every couple of months or years. **More recent alumni were most likely (70 percent) to report having spoken with someone from their CBYX participation in the past month** compared to alumni from the 1980s and 1990s cohorts (45-50 percent).
- **An overwhelming majority of host families and institutions reported benefits to their involvement with the program, with 94 percent of host families saying that hosting German CBYX students benefited their families.** All host school representatives



surveyed said that hosting German CBYX students benefited their institution.

- **Host families and host school representatives reported that hosting German CBYX students was a good opportunity for their families and institutions and helped them learn about German culture while also introducing the exchange students to different facets of American life.**
 - Most of the host families and school representatives interviewed live and work in rural areas or areas with limited tourism opportunities. They expressed that by hosting German CBYX students in these areas, they were able to expose those students to aspects of American culture not always captured in popular media.
 - On the other hand, host school representatives shared the importance of having students of varying backgrounds in their institution to expose local students to other cultures and ways of thinking. Ninety-three percent of host school representatives surveyed felt that the exposure to German exchange students had enriched local students' educational experiences.



EVALUATION BACKGROUND

PROGRAM BACKGROUND

The Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange program was inaugurated in 1984 through a bilateral agreement between the U.S. Congress and the German Bundestag. The program supports the exchange of American and German young people to sustain and strengthen the American-German friendship. Currently, six U.S. implementing partners (IPs) are connected with seven German IPs to administer three components of the CBYX program: 1) high school, 2) vocational, and 3) young professionals. Program activities in Germany for American participants are paid for and managed by the German government. Program activities for Germans that take place in the United States are paid for and managed by the U.S. government.

The U.S. and German governments have jointly implemented the CBYX program for the last 40 years. During this time there have been various government representatives, IPs, and other stakeholders involved in implementing the program. While the overall program model and experience has been consistent, CBYX participants may have had exposure to different resources, activities, or program follow-up depending on implementation decisions for a given program year.

EVALUATION PURPOSE AND EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The purpose of this evaluation was to assess short- and long-term outcomes for American CBYX participants and the effect of the program on American communities that hosted German participants. This report reflects the wishes of the CBYX program team. The intention of the study was not to produce findings and recommendations focused on implementation challenges or best practices.

The evaluation findings provide data and evidence to ECA's CBYX program team, who will be the primary user of the evaluation results, to understand program outcomes over time and prepare for the program's 40th anniversary of the program in 2023. ECA will use the information to understand if the program is achieving expected outcomes,

identify unexpected outcomes, and prepare materials for anniversary events. The findings also provide critical information to the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Congress, and other stakeholders such as U.S. IPs, the CBYX American Alumni Association, and host schools who have participated in the program. This evaluation draws from the experiences of alumni from the inaugural program in 1984 through the 2018 cohorts³ — a universe of approximately 14,000 American alumni — as well as other key stakeholders.

The evaluation answers the following overarching questions:

1. Has CBYX affected participants' knowledge, attitudes, and practices?
 - a. Did the CBYX program have an effect on the educational and professional trajectories of CBYX alumni?
 - b. Have alumni maintained a focus on German studies, language, or business relationships?
 - c. Did the program have an effect on alumni's view of the role of the United States or Americans in the world, or their identity as an American?
 - d. Did alumni share what they learned/their experiences during the program with their community, family, and friends? What did they share?
2. Has CBYX programming had an effect on American host families, schools, and communities?
 - a. Did hosting a German participant lead to increased understanding or interest in other cultures?
 - b. Did American organizations benefit from German participants working and volunteering with them? If so, how? If not, why not?

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

This evaluation utilized a mixed-methods design to gain a comprehensive understanding of participant experiences with the CBYX program. This evaluation only includes American alumni of the CBYX program, American host families of German CBYX participants, and American representatives of schools that hosted German CBYX participants. Additionally, the evaluation only includes alumni and host community members who participated between 1984 and the 2018-2019 program years. Participants who engaged in the program years beginning in 2019 to 2022 were excluded from the evaluation as experiences with the adapted CBYX program during the COVID-19 pandemic most likely

3. The cohort years refer to the year in which each exchange began. For instance, 1984 cohort refers to the program year from 1984-1985. 2018 refers to the program year beginning in 2018 and ending in 2019.



differ notably from those during any other cohort year.

All fieldwork occurred between March and August 2022. Researchers conducted a total of 13 focus groups with 47 participants representing American CBYX alumni, American host families, and host school representatives of German CBYX alumni; 39 individual interviews with American CBYX alumni; and 30 total interviews with 21 host family members and nine host school representatives of German CBYX alumni. A further breakdown of focus group and interview participant demographics can be found in Appendix 2.

A total of 1,853 respondents participated in an online survey. Of those 1,853 respondents, 1,141 were American CBYX alumni from the 1984 to the 2018 cohorts and 537 reported fulfilling host community roles. Some respondents have fulfilled multiple roles within the CBYX program (e.g., alumni acting as host family members after completing the program). A further breakdown of all respondents and their inclusion in the analysis can be found in Tables 1 and 2. More recent alumni were easier to contact than alumni from earlier years of the program as contact information (email addresses and phone numbers) from earlier years are either limited or defunct, most likely due to changes in contact information over time. This may have impacted response rates for this evaluation. More information on this limitation and strategies to improve outreach can be found in Appendix 1.

Figure 1. Total Evaluation Survey Responses — Alumni

Cohort Type	Total Survey Responses
American alumni (1984-2018 cohorts)	1,141
American alumni (2019-2021, not included in analysis)	202
German alumni (not included)	22
Did not specify	12
Total unique responses	1,377

Figure 2. Total Evaluation Survey Responses — Host Community Members

Cohort Type	Total Survey Responses
Host families (1984-2018 cohorts)	339
Host school representatives (1984-2018 cohorts)	43
Other host community members (1984-2018 cohorts)	155



Cohort Type	Total Survey Responses
Total aggregate host roles represented (some respondents fulfilled multiple roles)	537
Total unique host survey responses included in analysis	394 ⁴

4. Note that n=53 additional 2019-2021 hosts and n=2 German host families took the survey but were excluded from analysis.



ALUMNI FINDINGS⁵

Overall, responses from the qualitative and quantitative portions of the evaluation generated positive feedback from alumni on their experiences participating in the CBYX program. Alumni reported experiencing personal growth as a result of participation in the program, specifically in three major areas: 1) self-confidence, 2) ability to communicate with people from other cultures, and 3) ability to adapt to challenging circumstances. Alumni also shared a broadening of their worldview as a result of participation in the program, largely attributed to exposure to the German culture and the distinct political, social, and educational systems that Germany represents.

Alumni who participated in focus groups and interviews, as well as 88 percent of survey respondents, believed that they would not be where they are now academically or professionally had they not participated in the CBYX program. Many reported the skill sets they developed and strengthened during their participation in the program have set them apart from their peers when competing for university admissions and job opportunities. Alumni from all program components highlighted German language skills, problem solving skills, and communication skills as unique skill sets that they have been able to take into their professional lives since the program ended. Given the program component focus, young professional and vocational alumni more often highlighted professional and technical skill sets specific to their professional placements while in Germany that have set them apart from peers.

A majority of alumni who participated in the survey reported still maintaining some connections to Germany or the German language by communicating with German friends and colleagues they made during the program (often host family members), while a minority of those surveyed have subsequently studied in Germany (e.g., study abroad or full undergraduate or graduate degrees) or worked full-time in the country. More recent participants were more likely to report maintaining more connections and more frequent communication with friends and colleagues in Germany, since consistent communication tends to dim over time due to distance and changing

5. This section analyzes data from 10 focus groups with 36 participants from the cohort years 1984-1999; 2000-2009; 2010-2014; and 2015-2018; 39 individual in-depth interviews with alumni from the same years; and responses from 1,141 alumni who took the CBYX evaluation survey.

personal and professional life circumstances.

PERSONAL GROWTH AND CHANGES IN PARTICIPANT KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES, AND PRACTICES

EQ1. Has CBYX affected participants' knowledge, attitudes, and practices?

Across focus groups, in-depth interviews, and survey responses, alumni reported experiencing personal growth as a result of participation in the program, specifically in three major areas: 1) self-confidence, 2) ability to communicate with people from other cultures, and 3) ability to adapt to challenging circumstances. They reported that this personal growth helped them mature more quickly compared to their peers (high school alumni in particular reported this) and has allowed them to be flexible and adaptable in new situations and when interacting with people from different cultures.

They [the exchange organization] gave us a T-shirt that said something along the lines of, "The world doesn't change. We change." And I think that's kind of emblematic of the experience as a whole. It definitely changes you on a personal level. [High School Alumni, 2010-2011]

ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE

Alumni shared how they had to learn how to present and defend their opinions during their time in Germany. Since participants were considered representatives of the United States during their exchange, their host families, school mates, and work or internship colleagues often asked them about current events in the United States. These conversations gave participants the opportunity to explain American society and politics. Conversations also forced participants to think about how to explain unique aspects of American society in a way that was culturally relevant to their German friends and colleagues, particularly when those friends and colleagues challenged them on those topics.

Exchange students who went to Germany during times of political and social change in the United States, such as after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and during the early years of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, felt particularly challenged when asked about these topics. They shared that these discussions gave them an opportunity to reflect on the issues and think critically about their own opinions on the role of the United States in the world. Moreover, alumni were able to push the boundaries of their language and communication skills by discussing complex topics in German. Alumni came away from



the experience with strengthened communication skills and a deeper and more nuanced understanding of world affairs.

One of the biggest things that I was pushed to do was develop and be able to defend my own personal opinion. I think German culture is very much a culture in which you discuss current events, and you give your opinion, and you need to be able to defend it. And you need to be able to assert what you actually think and have a conversation about it. The way I had to answer questions about politics in the U.S. or internationally while being there really changed the way I thought about my own critical thinking skills and even just reading a news article and understanding the bias. Right now, I read news sources from Germany and the U.S. And that's something I didn't do before. So, I think all I'm trying to say is thinking more critically about things and being able to actually defend my opinion and be certain in it was not something I did before I left. [High School Alumni, 2017-2018]

SELF-CONFIDENCE

Alumni described feeling more confident in themselves and more capable of handling new situations independently as a result of participating in the CBYX program. Participants managed new living situations with host families, new schools and workplaces, a different culture, and day-to-day challenges like figuring out public transportation, all while operating outside their native language. Many alumni in focus groups and interviews claimed that these challenges prepared them for challenges later in life. They felt that after successfully navigating those challenges for a full year in Germany, they could handle any other challenge.

I feel like it really allowed me to develop a lot of the soft skills that you need to navigate life. So, feeling confident, walking into a room full of people that you don't know is very similar to living in a house where you don't speak the language. You kind of have to fake it until you make it. I think it also made me a little bit fearless. I've continued to make friendships through travel because I feel so much more confident in travel and in myself in those unknown areas. I'm willing to jump in wherever I am. [High School Alumni, 2006-2007]

I had the confidence that I could learn German and then I had the confidence that I could work in a lab because I had to learn how to work in a lab as an intern in a different language that I'd only been learning for four months, and I made it work. I was like, "If I can learn German and I can work in a lab and I can get by with the language, with little language I knew at the time, I can probably do most things if I put my mind to it." And I went and I completely switched gears. I was an archaeologist. And then all of a sudden, I was doing



cancer biology. And over the last 13 years, I didn't go to school for it. I never took a course for it in college or anything. [Vocational Alumni, 2001-2002]

ABILITY TO ADAPT

For many alumni, managing the challenges throughout the program contributed greatly to their personal growth. They described becoming more adaptable and resilient during challenging situations that arose from the exchange experience. Alumni from earlier years of the program reflected on how adaptability and resilience helped them manage personal and professional difficulties since finishing CBYX. Alumni from all years of the program spoke about how their program participation increased their maturity levels (often exceeding that of peers in the United States upon their return). High school alumni felt that they were better prepared than their peers to go away to college and succeed in their courses because they had already spent a year away from their families and taken classes in German as non-native speakers.

I really grew that year. I think the program as a whole really set me up for life. I went into college so much more prepared than I could have ever been had I just gone straight from American high school into American college. I was ready to live away from home and it really gave me more momentum going into adulthood than I ever expected. [High School Alumni, 2006-2007]

When I went to Germany, it was full of adversity, and I really had to be self-reliant and resilient. And I think what surprised me is I'm not fearful anymore. I'm willing to take risks ... And it is funny because my wife, when I said, "Hey, let's send our daughter to Germany." She said, "Why would you want to do that? You always say how difficult it was. You talked about all those terrible experiences and having to switch families and stuff." And it's like, you know what? Going away is hard. And having an experience like I had was hard, but it really was a foundation that taught me how to be resilient and how to deal with adversity and how to adjust and be flexible. [High School Alumni, 1985-1986]

For most people, it was a very hard year. And also, because it was so hard, also rewarding. There's a lot of growth that can come from the difficulties that you face there. Just random stuff that you get put through is just like, it depends on the person, how much they put themselves through, really. And so how much people grow is also based on how much they reached out on their year I feel like. [Vocational Alumni, 2016-2017]



Survey findings were very similar to those from the focus groups and interviews and demonstrate that the CBYX program pushes participants in a range of personal growth areas, especially those relating to cultures other than their own and adjusting to unfamiliar situations. When asked what areas of personal growth they experienced as a result of participation in the program, alumni across all program components reported appreciation for cultures other than their own, curiosity about the world, and growth in their ability to communicate with individuals from another culture. One high school alumna in a focus group discussion spoke to these areas of personal growth and described how, even after having grown up in a diverse and cosmopolitan city like New York City, living abroad for a year and being entirely immersed in a new culture made her even more open-minded and interested in learning about different cultures and perspectives.

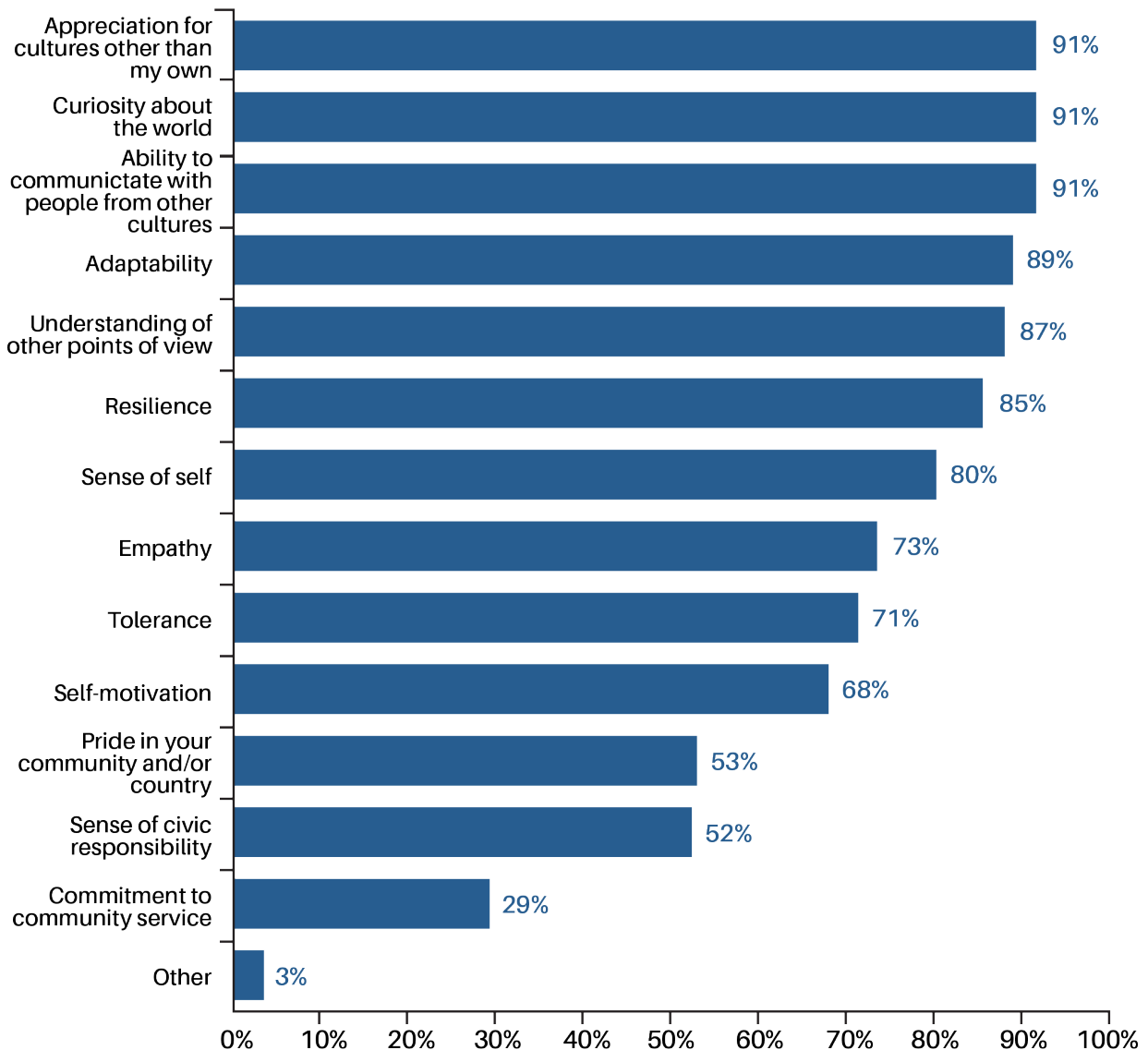
I grew up to an immigrant father who told me, “You grew up in New York City. You are the luckiest person in the world.” I thought I had the whole world at my door and in many ways, New York City is a crazy cosmopolitan city, but leaving and actually living in another place just made me realize how much exists and how much I don’t know. It made me want to continue learning more and more. You will always catch me trying to talk to someone who has a different perspective or learn something from someone else and the desire to continue to learn that is something, is how I would say my worldview changed the most. [High School Alumni, 2017-2018]

While alumni across program components reported similar areas of growth, vocational alumni reported the highest growth in several areas compared to the other program components’ alumni. For instance: 84 percent of vocational alumni reported an increase in tolerance, compared to 74 percent of high school alumni and 56 percent of young professional alumni. Similarly, 86 percent of vocational alumni reported an increase in self-motivation, compared to 69 percent of high school alumni and 57 percent of young professional alumni.



Figure 3. Alumni Personal Growth

In what areas did you experience personal growth as a result of your participation in the program? Please select all that apply.⁶⁷



6. Percentages show the total percentage of respondents that selected the skill listed, i.e., 91 percent of the 1,030 alumni that responded to this question selected “appreciation for cultures other than my own” as one of their answers. Multiple selections were allowed.

7. It should be noted that, though commitment to community service was an option in the survey, it is not a required component of American participants’ time in Germany.



CBYX EFFECTS ON ALUMNI EDUCATIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL TRAJECTORIES

EQ1.1 Did the CBYX program have an effect on the educational and professional trajectories of CBYX alumni?

Many alumni who participated in the focus groups and interviews, as well as 88 percent of survey respondents, believed that they would not be where they are now academically or professionally had they not participated in the program. For some it led to changes in career path decisions. For others it opened up new possibilities for work within their chosen field. In interviews and focus groups, many alumni shared that the impact of the program also extended beyond their professional lives into personal impacts, such as moving to a new city or country where they met their current partners.

Where I live currently and what I do for my job currently is inextricably linked to the fact that I had that internship because it's the thing that got my foot in the door to the career that I'm in. [Vocational Alumni, 2001-2002]

I would never have done so many things had it not been for CBYX. So, the best part of CBYX is my life today. [Young Professional Alumni, 1999-2000]

It's changed my life. I would not be where I am today without it. If I didn't do that exchange year, then I wouldn't have been able to do the double degree program that I did at NC State. I wouldn't have met my boyfriend. I wouldn't be in France ... I remember when I got to Germany again, and saw the old friends I made and started my university life there, I was thinking, "Oh my God, where would my life be if I didn't go to Germany?" Because so much built off from there to create who I am today. It was a significant year of my life. So definitely, very positively impactful and forever grateful for CBYX. [High School Alumni, 2014-2015]

NEW OPPORTUNITIES

For some participants, CBYX clearly opens new professional and educational avenues. In focus groups and interviews, some alumni reported that they were able to discover new professional passions through their internship experiences or due to their exposure to the German language and new cultures outside of the United States. These experiences in Germany sparked interest for many alumni in fields like international relations, policy, or teaching. One vocational alumnus from the 2001-2002 cohort shared how, although he previously had different interests, his internship in molecular biology in Germany prompted



him to switch careers. Because of his experience working in a biology lab in Germany, he was able to pivot and now has a successful career in the health field despite having never obtained a degree in biology.

Now I can look back to [the program] and [say], “Okay, that’s where my passion began.” And I think that’s part of what drives some of the decisions that I make now because I want people to be able to see intercultural exchange and be able to experience maybe another layer of themselves or people who they otherwise wouldn’t know. [High School Alumni, 2009-2010]

CBYX was a really big pivot moment for me professionally. I was always a very, go, go, go, academic person and my year in Germany really forced me to slow down and reflect. I came back to university and finished my engineering degree, but because of the time that I spent with my host family, all the time I spent with my young siblings and volunteering at their school, I knew that I wanted to try teaching, so this directly influenced my decision to join the Peace Corps. I wanted another cultural experience, I wanted to go abroad again, and I wanted to learn another language. And now I’m getting certified for teaching English as a second language. It really opened up the world of languages and working with kids. I got the first taste of all of them through CBYX. If I hadn’t had taken that time to slow down and do this program, I would probably be at a desk job in an engineering plant somewhere. My life would be completely different, for sure. [Young Professional Alumni, 2016-2017]

NEW PATHWAYS TO ACHIEVE GOALS

Participation in CBYX reinforces previous personal and professional interests and often reveals to participants new pathways to achieving their goals. Several alumni in focus groups and interviews shared how they were able to identify new options within their fields of interest based on their experiences in Germany.

One vocational alumna from the 2018-2019 cohort described how she was interested in the medical field before going to Germany. Working in clinics in northern Germany for her internship sparked an interest in obstetric medicine which she chose to study at university. Another high school alumna from the 1989-1990 cohort always knew that she wanted to be a teacher and her exposure to the German language during CBYX prompted her to become a German language teacher and even start her own two-week summer immersion program in Germany for American high school students. A young professional alumnus from the 1987-1988 cohort (quoted below) gained an internship with a bank while in Germany and was offered a full-time position upon completing the CBYX program. After a year in that position, he was able to transfer to the New York branch of the bank where he



then worked for 24 years.

It gave me a good start. It gave me a bridge to the working world, to the adult world. And I think back in the day, it was very difficult to get a job from the want ads in the paper. That was a challenge. So, this was an easy way for me to hit the ground running and start to build something. [Young Professional Alumni, 1987-1988]

I'd already had a passion for wanting to study there [in Germany] because my background is aerospace engineering, and Germany is one of the founding nations of the aerospace industry ... So the passion to go there had already been there just because I knew the engineering background and the impact that the country had had on the space industry. I think for me the value came from the ability to take a step away once I graduated from undergrad and see new possibilities from my career field before, I came back to the U.S. to really get into my career. [Young Professional Alumni, 2017-2018]

UNIQUE RESUME BOOSTER

Alumni shared that program participation sets them apart from their peers in educational and professional settings. They believed that having an experience like CBYX on their resumes, with all the personal growth and skill-building that it entails, made them more attractive candidates for university or other program acceptance, as well as job interviews and offers. Because their programs included professional placements, young professional and vocational alumni in particular spoke about how their time in Germany gave them unique work experience which they believe boosted their professional opportunities. Compared to their peers, they had experience working with diverse teams in another language. Vocational alumni noted that having work experience before entering college put them ahead of their peers who went straight into university and did not have the same professional skills. High school alumni noted similar benefits but often in the context of educational applications.

I think it definitely put me at a better position compared to other candidates. Having work experience before going into college is a huge plus from people who are looking to hire ... They see the program as a really good opportunity because learning to deal with different challenges that you may face abroad shows them who you are. [Vocational Alumni, 2008-2009]

Now I study an interdisciplinary program [in Europe] in politics, psychology, law, and economics, which is highly selective. It has, I think, a 15 percent acceptance rate. And I don't



think that I would've seemed quite as appealing to them if I didn't have that added level of proven maturity, proven interest in affairs outside of the United States, proven interest in Europe, specifically that came from having gone abroad with CBYX. [High School Alumni, 2017-2018]

After my exchange year in high school, I became a missionary for my church for 18 months. They sent me to Switzerland, Austria, and Germany, I think because of the language skills. And I think that was connected with my CBYX experience, because I don't think they would've sent me there without knowing that I spoke some German. [High School Alumni, 2012-2013]

USING ACQUIRED SKILLS

Alumni reported acquiring a variety of soft and hard skills that they have been able to apply in their educational and professional careers since returning home from the program. These include soft skills such as increased communication and problem-solving as well as hard skills such as program management and German language skills. Reported soft and hard skill acquisition and application is similar across decades of the program. According to survey responses, there are no significant differences in skill acquisition among alumni from distinct decades of the program, indicating consistent program outcomes in skill acquisition and application for alumni over the lifetime of the CBYX program.

Soft Skill Application

Alumni noted that the soft skills (i.e., communicating with others, problem-solving, resourcefulness, and leadership, etc.) they strengthened during the CBYX program provided them with the necessary skills to be able to work across diverse teams and communicate more effectively with others. One recent alumnus who is currently studying engineering shared that the language and communication skills he gained in Germany set him apart from peers in his same field. Alumni indicated that those who have technical knowledge but less experience communicating that knowledge are less equipped for success in their careers.

I study mechanical engineering. And as time's gone on, I've been leaning more on my German side because there's a little over a thousand mechanical engineering students right now and out of that, I know maybe three people who also have a German minor or major in addition to that. So, it's a really good soft skill I can use that shows I'm not like the 999 other people out there. I have worldly skills that I can apply. There's so many incredibly smart people in the world, but there's a very small amount of people who are smart and can



... speak well. And being able to speak in their language, German, especially because German industry ... it's pretty big. It's really a game-changer, in terms of the jobs you can apply for and what you can do with your degree after you graduate. [High School Alumni, 2018-2019]

Alumni across programs spoke about how navigating a new cultural environment — and for young professional and vocational alumni, working or interning in German businesses — taught them how to work effectively within a different cultural context. Several shared that the cultural competency they gained through their professional placements has made them better team leaders in their current careers. They recognize that all team members (particularly international team members) come from distinct cultural settings and that their unique working styles can be leveraged to create more dynamic and effective methods of accomplishing tasks collaboratively. Moreover, learning how to work across diverse teams made alumni better leaders in their subsequent careers.

I think that the experience [CBYX] makes me a lot more empathetic to other people and other cultures and other situations. I would say, because of my experience, I'm a more empathetic leader. [Young Professional Alumni, 1988-1989]

Something I definitely took back was the strength in my cultural awareness and the differences that cultures can have between one another. And to understand that one's [culture is] not better than another, which [has] helped me out with my career as an educator — understanding the diversity within the classroom, within our school, and having that ability to understand what it's like to be the odd one out. [Vocational Alumni, 2012-2013]

I deal with the intersection of politics, regulation, and technology. I manage a team of technology experts in China right now, and the geopolitics around that, and just understanding the nuance and the perspective that my team brings as Chinese nationals into what is a really fraught, tense situation right now. I feel like a lot of the skills I use to manage my team through this situation, I learned however many gajillion years ago in Germany. [High School Alumni, 1984-1985]

I'm a leader of a company on the executive team. I have to work with a lot of different people who have their own perspectives and lenses, whether they're on the legal side, whether they're on the sales side, whether they're on the finance side. They know their way, and all think their way is the best way. I try to really bridge the gap, bring people together, and show a more unified approach to working on things. I think it's just made it either easier at times, or maybe it was the catalyst for some of my career growth and career opportunities, because I had some skill sets that I developed in my year abroad that I maybe wouldn't have had



otherwise but turned out to be pretty important in the workings of the business world. [High School Alumni, 1987-1988]

On several survey indicators, young professionals reported lower increases than participants from other program components, like communication skills, self-initiative, and decision-making.⁸ For example, 86 percent of young professionals surveyed reported increasing their communication skills, compared to 93 percent of high school alumni and 97 percent of vocational alumni. Additionally, 53 percent of young professionals reported increasing their decision-making skills, compared to 65 percent of high school alumni and 73 percent of vocational alumni. In focus groups and interviews, no clear differences on skill acquisition among program types arose. These differences may be due to the point in their life at which alumni took part in the program. For instance, young professionals often already have work experience upon entering the program and so may experience slightly lower increases compared to high school and vocational alumni with little to no professional experience. One alumnus from the 2016-2017 cohort articulated this finding during a focus group, stating that, while CBYX did not ultimately alter his professional trajectory, he experienced immense personal growth that made him more resilient and open towards other cultures.

I was a teacher before I left and I was a teacher after I left. So my life didn't change its trajectory, but it formed who I am as a person. [Young Professional Alumni, 2016-2017]

By contrast, vocational alumni reported more increases in skills overall compared to high school and young professional alumni. For instance, 84 percent of vocational alumni surveyed reported an increase in problem-solving skills compared to 75 percent of high school alumni and 68 percent of young professionals. Similarly, 80 percent of vocational alumni surveyed reported an increase in self-initiative compared to 71 percent of high school alumni and 60 percent of young professionals. Similar to the findings above, this may be due to the unique position of vocational participants who are often transitioning between high school and the higher education and professional world. In focus groups and interviews, vocational alumni spoke about how participating in the CBYX program at that stage of their lives helped them better identify their interests and prompted them to make important decisions upon their return about future educational and career steps. Having a break between high school and college or the working world gave them the necessary time to determine what their most appropriate next step would be.

8. See Appendix 3 for further breakdown of these data.



Hard Skill Application

Survey results also demonstrate that alumni believe they are able to incorporate skills from their participation in the program to their professional lives. As shown in the graph below, 84 percent of respondents reported that they utilize German language skills in their professional life. Forty-seven percent and 43 percent, respectively, report utilizing teaching skills and project management skills in their professional life.

However, alumni of the three program components reported different acquired skills application. Vocational and young professional program participants were more likely than alumni from the high school program (30 and 34 percent, respectively, versus 17 percent) to apply business management skills gained through the program in their professional lives. Alumni indicated during interviews and focus groups that their professional placements contributed to their ability to apply some of these hard skills. Additionally, outcomes for skill utilization differ between male and female alumni. Compared to male alumni, female alumni reported lower skill utilization in their professional lives in business management (30 percent versus 17 percent) and technology skills (23 percent versus 11 percent).

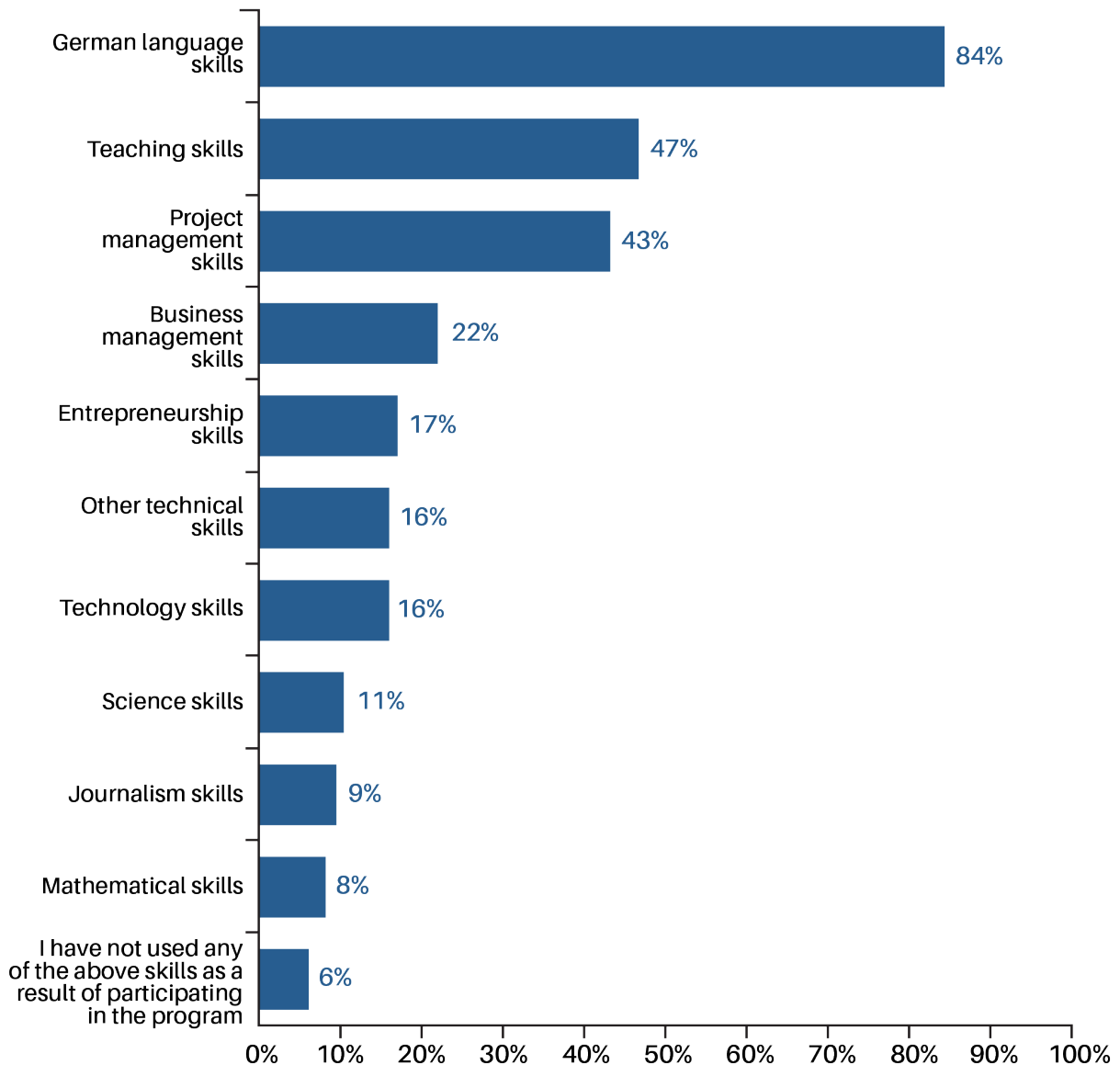
One high school alumna who is now a German and Spanish language teacher said that her teaching style is heavily informed by how she learned the German language during the CBYX program. Although she was able to learn the basics of the language during the language school at the beginning of the program, most of her language learning occurred outside the classroom in her daily interactions with others. Now, she tries to replicate her exchange experience to language acquisition in her classes, encouraging students to debate, put on skits, and present on a variety of topics without fear of grammatical error to get them comfortable with the language.

It's [the program] totally, absolutely 100 percent impacted how I teach as well. Because I was in high school in the '80s and it was all about verb charts. That's not important. Most important is that you're understood. I always tell the kids [students], let's get you speaking so you're understood, and the grammar will fall into place later. When a little boy's crying, because "he tookted my toy," you don't say, "well, wait a second, 'you take' is irregular in the past tense. Talk to me once you have it right." No, you don't do that. But that all comes back to my own experiences. Right? All those adjective endings and all that difficult stuff in German, you'll get that figured out later. [High School Alumna, 1989-1990]



Figure 4. Alumni Skill Application

Have you been able to apply any of the following skills you gained from the program to your professional life? Please select all that apply.⁹



N = 1,027 CBYX alumni from cohorts 1984-2018 across all three program components.

9. Percentages show the total percentage of respondents that selected the skill listed, i.e., 84 percent of the 1,027 alumni that responded to this question selected "German language skills" as one of their answers. Multiple selections were allowed.



CONTINUED ENGAGEMENT

The CBYX program expands the social and professional circles of those who participate, even decades after their participation in the program. Alumni continue to engage with the CBYX program after returning home. They engage with the CBYX Alumni Association, volunteer with program implementing partners, communicate and visit with American participants and German connections, and maintain professional connections in Germany.

Almost two-thirds of all CBYX alumni who responded to the survey reported being in touch with someone in the last month and 86 percent were in touch with someone at least annually. More recent alumni are even more likely to be in frequent touch with someone from CBYX. Nearly 70 percent of alumni who participated between 2010 and 2018 reported being in touch with someone from their CBYX experience in the past month, compared to 45-50 percent of alumni from 1984-1999. In focus groups and interviews, alumni explain that over the years it becomes more difficult to stay in touch. For alumni from earlier years of the program, staying in touch was made more difficult because of the lack of social media at their time of participation. However, some described using Facebook and Instagram to look up German friends/colleagues and other CBYX alumni years after participating.

Over 70 percent of all CBYX alumni who responded to the evaluation survey are still in touch with five or more people that they met via the CBYX program. Additionally, 56 percent of respondents reported being part of the CBYX Alumni Association (CBYXAA)¹⁰ and those who reported being members were 10 percent more likely than non-members to maintain five or more relationships from the CBYX program. High school participants were less likely than vocational or young professionals to be in the Alumni Association (47 percent vs 67-68 percent). Findings were unclear about why this discrepancy exists.

CONTINUED ENGAGEMENT WITH CBYX

After finishing the program, alumni hold a strong desire to maintain connections with their fellow alumni and the CBYX program more generally. Moreover, alumni reported a desire to “give back” to the CBYX program to support the continued success of the program and ensure that more young Americans are granted the opportunity to benefit from it.

10. ECA collaborated closely with the CBYXAA to conduct outreach to alumni for this evaluation, resulting in a higher representation of members. Overall, CBYXAA membership represents approximately 13% of all CBYX alumni.



In focus groups and interviews, alumni reported utilizing multiple formal and informal channels to maintain contact with fellow alumni. One vocational alumna shared that she has volunteered with the CBYXAA to host small group activities where alumni can gather to practice their German. Alumni also reported maintaining communication with fellow alumni individually and even visiting one another years after finishing the program to keep strong connections.

Alumni reported having engaged with the CBYX program more generally to “give back” or actively searching for ways to continue engagement. In focus groups and interviews, some alumni reported signing up to participate in the evaluation to share the strong positive outcomes they experienced and their recommendations for how to continue to leverage the success of the program for future participants. Many mentioned wanting to share their positive experiences so that others might learn about the benefits of the program and to ensure continued funding for the program.

I've written my senator a few times and my representatives advocating for the program ... just to remind them that it is impactful for citizens and that it's impactful for not only the person that did it, but also the entire community around them. [Vocational Alumni, 2013-2014]

Several said that the fact that the program is fully funded was a critical component which allowed them to engage in international exchange that they otherwise would not have been able to afford. This makes the program more inclusive of individuals who would like to participate but may not have the means to pay for a private exchange. Those same alumni also recommended increased funding for the program to provide stipends for lower-income participants so they feel more supported in paying for necessary goods (i.e., toiletries, some food expenses, etc.) and can participate in additional excursions and activities not included in the program funding but that bolster their program experiences. Many alumni described how the program being funded allowed them to participate in an experience they would not otherwise have been able to fund themselves. However, some still experienced difficulty paying for day-to-day expenses not covered by the program.

75 [participants] was not enough. If they had more funding, send more, because right now we need people that have a larger worldview. People that have gone through things like that [CBYX program] and not just what they read on Instagram. The more people the better, because then you would have more people with these experiences. [Young Professional Alumni, 2011-2012]

I was able to fund my external expenses through a separate grant that I had applied for. But I



think it's not a cheap country necessarily. And there are external expenses just in your day-to-day life. I knew people who really couldn't do a lot just because they didn't [have the funds]. So I do think that makes it inaccessible for some people who would really benefit from the program. [High School Alumni, 2017-2018]

Alumni also reported volunteering with program IPs as interviewers and orientation support staff for incoming participants. They described this as a way to help identify potential participants and support their entry into the program. Several alumni, particularly those from self-described lower socioeconomic backgrounds, reported only having awareness of the program through others that had participated or through their German teachers. Some alumni were only able to find CBYX through searching for study abroad scholarships. These same alumni professed wanting to support other, less-engaged groups to raise awareness of the program.

Additionally, approximately 1/8th of alumni who responded to the survey reported acting as hosts for German CBYX exchange students at some point after returning from the program. One alumnus from a 1980s cohort took a further step and applied for a DOS Community Development Action Fund (CDAF) grant to build out an alumni-current participant mentorship program for DOS exchange programs to support positive participant outcomes and also provide another avenue for continued alumni engagement. Finally, alumni recommend participation in the CBYX program to other young Americans and hosting to their families. Three alumni even reported having their children apply for and participate in the program (see more in “Sharing CBYX Experiences”).

CONTINUED CONNECTIONS WITH GERMANY AND THE GERMAN LANGUAGE

EQ1.2 Have alumni maintained a focus on German studies, language, or business relationships?

Across focus groups, interviews, and survey responses, alumni reported maintaining relationships with German host family members and German friends and colleagues years after the program ended. Some alumni reported returning to Germany for continued study (either for study abroad or a full university degree) or work opportunities after the program ended, though these individuals are in the minority of alumni. Moreover, many alumni in focus groups and interviews reported attaining fluency or near fluency in German by the end of the CBYX program. Alumni continue to utilize German language skills to varying degrees both personally and professionally.



CONTINUING RELATIONSHIPS WITH GERMANY/GERMANS

Personal Relationships

Alumni often discussed the relationships they built while in Germany as a key benefit of their experience and a main reason why they continue to maintain connections with Germany and the German language. Of alumni who responded to the survey, 67 percent reported maintaining communication with host families, 59 percent with friends in Germany, and 44 percent a classmate in Germany. In focus groups and interviews, alumni often cited their experience with their host families as one of the key factors that affected their overall experience with the program. In the survey, when asked to select the one program component with the biggest impact on their life, 29 percent of respondents selected the friendships and personal relationships they built during the program, followed closely by the host family component (25 percent).

She was my rock. My host mom was my everything while I was over there, was absolutely the reason I learned German at all, because her English was never really that good to begin with, and so if I wanted to speak with her, I needed to learn it. [High School Alumni, 2009-2010]

I think my experience with the host family really made things easier. It wasn't something that you just do by yourself. So, there's always a way to break in because you have somebody that guides you through and walks you through a lot of the stuff. So definitely, my challenge is different from other people's challenge. I think some of my cohorts in the program where they don't have host families, I can imagine it was definitely more difficult in that regards. [Young Professional Alumni, 2008-2009]

In focus groups and interviews, some alumni reported having returned to visit their host families in Germany, participating in host family members' weddings, and, in a few instances, even being selected as godparents of host family members' children. Others maintain occasional contact via Whatsapp, phone calls, or through social media.

I'm still very close with my host brother. I saw him right before COVID shut everything down, and his family. I'm the godmother to his youngest son. Yeah. He's one of my closest friends and I am so grateful for that relationship as well. [High School Alumni, 1984-1985]

My host family, I'm still very much in touch with. My host sister was maid of honor at our wedding. She and the whole family came to my wedding. My parents and my host parents have met. And she's visited me in the states almost every summer that I lived there. And then I would come back and visit them. [High School Alumni, 2006-2007]



Professional Relationships

The majority of alumni highlighted their personal relationships, but 26 percent of alumni also reported maintaining professional relationships. Among those that have professional relationships with people in Germany, the majority (70 percent) reported maintaining general networks and connections with individuals in their field. Alumni also reported maintaining mentorship relationships (36 percent) and employee relationships (35 percent) with individuals in Germany. One young professional alumnus from the 1999-2000 cohort shared that he was able to identify his lifelong career during his internship in Germany, has since worked for several automotive companies both in the United States and in Germany and, ultimately, has lived and worked in Germany for a total of 10 years since finishing the program. Another more recent young professional alumnus describes how he stays in touch with some German classmates who work in the engineering industry and he hopes that their relationship could lead to professional collaboration in the future:

All of my [German] classmates there work in [the engineering] industry now, and we do connect on just what's going on in the industry. I also started a little think tank with some friends here and we're working on some aerospace related projects. I have approached some of my classmates from Germany, but of course, they're very busy and there's a whole different mindset when it comes to startups and new companies and stuff like that in German culture. So, we talk about stuff, but there's no actual working together yet, but I'm hoping that one day we can get to a point where I can expand what I'm working on to my friends in Germany and build more of an international collaboration on some of those projects. [Young Professional Alumni, 2017-2018]

VARYING CONTINUED USAGE OF THE GERMAN LANGUAGE

Alumni who participated in focus groups and interviews reported enjoying learning the German language through the CBYX program. Many shared that the language school at the beginning of the program provided them with the fundamentals of the German language and was very valuable. This course allowed them to be successful navigating school, professional placements, and social relationships during the rest of the program. Some alumni explained that living with host families also contributed greatly to their German language acquisition as it provided them with daily practice opportunities in practical conversations.

Post-program, alumni continue practicing the German language to varying degrees. Although 84 percent of alumni who responded to the survey reported continuing to use their German language skills professionally, analysis of focus groups and interviews



provide a more nuanced explanation of how this usage varies. According to survey results, high school alumni were significantly more likely than the other two program cohorts to have applied German language skills and teaching skills in their professional lives. However, most alumni in focus groups and interviews said that they use German only occasionally in their personal relationships with host families, friends, and colleagues from Germany. Without continued frequent use of the language, many alumni reported diminished language capacity over time. Nevertheless, alumni stated that being able to include German language proficiency on resumes sets them apart from their peers in job searches.

In terms of what I've gained the most from taking part in this program from a material point, it's just the language. Taking part in this program, I ended up having a secondary major in German, and then I worked with the German embassy in Washington, D.C., and then I moved to Germany, and then I worked in New York in the UN with Germany. It's such a fundamental turning point for me that it's really hard to say what the best thing was. [High School Alumni, 2007-2008]

Finally, in interviews and focus groups, several high school alumni reported continuing to study German in college or electing to study abroad or pursue a full degree in Germany. In this way, these alumni build on the language skills they acquired during the program and leverage those skills to be successful in their educational careers.

I really do find any excuse to use German or speak to German people. And that was evident in college. I majored in German. I went back to Germany to study in Berlin, and I plan on going back to do grad school or do a master's in Germany in the future. I always try to find a way to go back because it was a really transformative part of my life. I had so many positive experiences and positive relationships built in that one year that I plan to keep for a very long time and thinking about it and just speaking about it with you guys [other alumni in the focus group] and hearing your experiences really makes me smile because I'm not the only one that has been transformed by this program. [High School Alumni, 2016-2017]

SHIFTS IN WORLDVIEWS

EQ1.3 Did the program have an effect on alumni's view of the role of the United States of America in the world or on their identity as an American?

Alumni reported important shifts in their worldviews as a result of participation in the CBYX program. In focus groups and interviews, alumni attributed this to the immersive nature of



the program. Living with German families, attending German schools, working at German businesses, and navigating a different culture provided them with a deeper understanding of the culture and gave them the opportunity to reflect on their own cultures.

It really gave me a global perspective on life. And seeing America from the outside really changed things for me. It allowed me to see a lot of different ways of living is not better or worse than one another, but just a different way of living. And it allowed me to think critically of the way I was raised and of the way others were raised. My host dad loves to ask me about current events and the American perspective on that. He asked me the other day about what I think about what's going on in Ukraine right now. And so, he would always very much push me to give my own perspective on that [Ukrainian situation]. And he thought it was interesting coming from an American perspective. And I didn't think of myself as coming from that different of a perspective, but [the program] definitely gave me a more global mindset. [High School Alumni, 2018-2019]

ANALYTICAL MINDSET TOWARD U.S. POLICIES

Most alumni reported gaining a better understanding of different political and social contexts and realized that there are models other than that of the United States. Ninety-three percent of alumni who responded to the survey reported that participation in the program changed their understanding of the roles both the United States and American citizens play in the world. Furthermore, many shared that their time in Germany revealed opportunities for the United States to continue improving its political, social, health care, and urban infrastructure. After their time in Germany, many alumni interviewed felt that there were areas where the United States falls short compared to the German welfare state, such as social and economic support for its citizens in the areas of health care and higher education or efficient public transportation systems.

Seeing that society can function with a completely different government, completely different rules, different aspects, different outlooks. It was just so refreshing to see. [Young Professional Alumni, 2014-2015]

There's a lot of ways where we could improve voting and improve access to health care. When I look at the U.S., everyone's always trying to figure things out, right? We were the first big stab at democracy. But there's more democracies post-U.S.. So, there's been improvements made. I've become aware of these other ways of doing things that I think are better than our way. And I'm really happy that we have a democracy and that we have a system of voting, but I think now learning about these other countries who have done it



better, I think that we could learn from them also. [Vocational Alumni, 2016-2017]

My perspective on America and Americans changed. I guess in Germany it begins with the entire educational system as a whole. They're on a bit of a different model. Education advances a lot quicker so my peers in Germany were already doing calculus, and my peers in the states in 10th grade, they would've been doing geometry or algebra I. So, it really just made me think, "Man, we could do so much better with our schools, with the public school system at least." [High School Alumni, 2010-2011]

INCREASED EMPATHY AND OPEN-MINDEDNESS TO OTHER CULTURES

Alumni reported feeling more empathetic and open-minded to cultures different from their own. In survey responses, nine out of 10 alumni reported an increase in appreciation of cultures other than their own and curiosity about the world. Additionally, 98 percent of alumni who responded to the survey reported an increase in cross-cultural awareness as a result of participation in the program, and 73 percent reported growth in empathy for others. Focus groups and interviews with alumni reinforced the survey findings, with participants explaining that their own experiences as non-native individuals in a country trying to communicate with others in their non-native language made them much more empathetic to immigrants and visitors to the United States.

Some experiences that I took back was the ability to have more strength in my cultural awareness and the differences that cultures can have between one another. And to understand that one's not better than another, they're just different, which has really helped me out with my career as an educator, understanding the diversity within the classroom, within our school and having that ability to understand what it's like to be the odd one out. [Vocational Alumni, 2012-2013]

As a result of their experience, alumni understood how difficult it is to try to communicate with others across language barriers and cultural boundaries. For example, many CBYX alumni saw Germans as very blunt and straightforward in their communication. On the other hand, they view Americans as more subtle with their statements and requests. Alumni had to learn to share their ideas and requests in German and in a way that was culturally appropriate. They often described that they learned "there is no right or wrong way" to communicate or "right or wrong way" for a culture to be. This encouraged them to be open and empathetic to ways that others prefer to interact and express themselves even when it is different from their own.



I also found having the experience of being the person in the room who isn't the native speaker, living in a country where the language is not your first language, was really eye opening. And I found that has made me, I hope, a lot more empathetic to people. We knew what we wanted to say in our heads, but the German that we spoke was not there. I had such dissonance between the person that I felt I was and the person that I could be because of my language skills. So having that experience now, I feel like I do the same thing. I try not to assume and ask questions first. I also try to be more patient. And also, when I hear somebody is new to the city, I try to be more welcoming, which has been really, really helpful in the way that I've moved through life since then. [Young Professional Alumni, 2016-2017]

About half of the participants in focus groups and interviews noted that they had an interest in Germany and/or the German language prior to participating in the program, while the other half had limited exposure to the German culture. However, nearly all alumni in focus groups and interviews said they learned that the German culture is more diverse than they had originally thought. They found that the cultural characteristics, accents, social attitudes, and traditions differ between regions and cities within Germany, visible in the way traditional heritage, foods, architecture, and celebrations vary across the country.

I emerged with an understanding of Germany as a place of a depth of diversity that I did not understand before. How so many Germans, your interactions with them, let you know that they don't think of themselves as Germans first. They're like, "I'm a north German." Or they'll say, "I'm a Saxon. I'm a Bavarian. We're all so different." They'll tell you their little stereotypes about it, but really, what they're telling you with that is, we think of ourselves in very complex ways. And you emerge with that understanding that there is no typical German. And then you kind of extrapolate that to all the people of the world ideally. [High School Alumni, 2007-2008]

Alumni in focus groups and interviews shared their observations that Germans are politically minded and tend to engage in discussions on issues of global importance and expect others to do so as well, more so than Americans. They often stated that they felt that education in the United States was focused on U.S. history and politics and that, as a result, Americans' general awareness of other countries/cultures was lower than that of the average German. Some alumni cited their experience going to school in Germany as an example, highlighting the variety of countries they learned about in their history and politics courses. Going to school in Germany exposed participants to more versions of the history than they had learned in American schools, which allowed them to consider past events from new perspectives. This aligns with findings from the survey in which 87 percent of alumni who responded reported an increased understanding of other points of



view as a result of participation in the program.

A lot of Germans are very politically active, and they really do know about what's going on. Not just in Germany, but the world, which is a lot different than the U.S. The U.S. is very much, what's happening in the U.S.? I get it, U.S. is a lot larger than Germany, so there is a lot of ground to cover when it comes to news. I had to, I guess, remember that the world doesn't revolve around the U.S. [Young Professional Alumni, 2016-2017]

NEWFOUND APPRECIATION FOR THE UNITED STATES

Alumni gained a newfound appreciation for the United States, particularly with regard to the freedoms afforded to Americans (freedom of speech, freedom of religion) and the educational and career opportunities available in the country. In the survey, 53 percent of alumni said that their pride in their community and/or country increased as a result of participation in the program. Some alumni described feeling like true ambassadors of the United States and took pride representing the different facets of American culture and identity.

It [participation in the CBYX program] definitely made me realize how lucky we are to be Americans. I think there's a lot of places in the world, not necessarily like in Germany, but other places in the world where they don't have as much freedom in terms of economic opportunities and even freedom of speech. [Young Professional Alumni, 2008-2009]

In the U.S., we have a very clear view of ourselves, but overseas, that view is more nuanced. You get people who really, really love the United States and people who really dislike the United States and people who would dislike me because I'm from the United States. And I had to learn how to reevaluate my views in light of all of this. And I think actually my views became stronger. I had to reaffirm my confidence that I like being American that I like that I get the opportunity to come over here. And I like that I get the opportunity to see what other people think of the United States, but that my views do not necessarily depend on their views. [High School Alumni, 2017-2018]

In an interview, one high school alumna from the 1989 cohort described participants' changing mindsets as they go through the program. For the first several months, participants feel that everything (food, culture, transportation, etc.) is better and more exciting in Germany. As the program continues and participants settle into their daily routines, they are able to reflect on their perceptions of Germany and their home country. Many ultimately find a balance between the aspects of German culture they appreciate and



characteristics of American culture they appreciate. Alumni reported believing strongly that the United States offers a freedom of choice and many options from which to choose in terms of study, careers, and even social groups and activities compared to other countries.

At first, everything is better than your home country, then everything's worse than your home country and then you come to view it as apples and oranges... Being an exchange student, you see the world through a less bias[ed] set of eyes. Exposure is the antidote to close[d] mindedness. [High School Alumni, 1989-1990]

Several recent alumni discussed how their discussions with Germans on politics and social issues helped them to better define their own opinions about the United States. Because Germans often asked them about current events in the United States, they learned how to explain and contextualize complex aspects of American culture. In the process, many developed a sense of pride about American culture and America's role on the global stage.

I think it does make you critical in many ways and you form skills to help understand your own cultural context better and American influence and American culture... I think what it did for me was realizing how much I do love the U.S. ... You learn how to contextualize and explain some of these really complex things about your culture to the rest of the world and present and defend your own culture in a good light while also being able to understand it and be critical of it. I think you do develop a pride in a way that I didn't really have before, and you do come to appreciate what you love about your own country. [High School Alumni, 2017-2018]

When I left, I was 18 and it was election season and [there was the] Iraq war and Afghanistan ... one of the many difficult periods in American foreign policy. And I remember thinking, "Ah, I'm going to stay in Germany forever. This is my ticket away." But it [CBYX experience] really made me think more critically about the U.S.'s role. And by the end of it, I was convinced I would never give up my U.S. citizenship. It forced me to really be confronted with what does it mean to be American and what does it mean to work with and for certain values or ideals. [High School Alumni, 2007-2008]

INCREASED NUANCE ON AMERICAN IDENTITY

Several participants of color, especially Black Americans, reported exploring new facets of their identity through their experience as nonwhite Americans abroad in the primarily white context they encountered in Germany. Although there were no significant differences in reported changes in personal growth based on race and ethnicity from the survey, alumni



in focus groups and interviews explained that the personal growth that they experienced had novel aspects. They described how, in the United States, the particular factors of their identity (including race and ethnicity) often become what defines them to other Americans. However, in Germany, they were often perceived first as American. For some, this rearranging of the defining aspects of their identity gave them a unique opportunity to reexamine their own identities as Americans and as ambassadors representing the diverse segments of the U.S. population and its cultures.

I do feel like while I was in Germany, people's viewpoint of me was American first. Of course, I'm Black, but I'm American. You speak English, you grew up in the U.S., you're American. However, on the flip side, when I am in the U.S., I'm Black first...But in Germany, I'm American first and I would represent kind of this identity of Americans' perspectives, American English perspectives, American culture perspectives, which for me, being a part of the African-American subculture, I'm familiar with American culture, but I'm also like, "Okay, I also have my African-American culture too, so I think you guys should also probably know more about." It's hard to explain, but for me here [in the United States], it's almost as if my American identity is diminished a little bit because I'm Black first. [High School Alumni, 2000-2010 decade]

Some alumni shared how their experience as exchange students helped them better understand their experience as immigrants to the United States. One alumnus expressed that seeing Vietnamese immigrant communities in Germany further contextualized his own experience as a first-generation Vietnamese-American. Observing and meeting people from his country of origin building communities in a different country than his own naturalized state (the United States) gave him the unique opportunity to compare immigrant experiences based on the country to which people immigrate. Moreover, being outside of the U.S. context and reflecting back allowed him to build a greater understanding about what "being American" meant to him.

I'm Vietnamese-American. There's a dash between Vietnamese and American that I feel like sometimes people want to erase that dash and make it "we're just one country, one people," whatever. To me, the unique part of being American is that I can have that dash and say, I am Vietnamese, but I'm also American. I saw [that] there's Vietnamese people in Germany. They have a meaning of that. I'm Vietnamese in America, and so not wanting to erase that dash for me is super important in what my sense of being American is. For me, the culture piece of America lives between that dash. I can take what I love and deeply value about being Vietnamese and build that into how I can continue to build on to being American. When you experience and have those conversations with people, with Vietnamese outside of the U.S., it



puts in context what it really means to be American. [Young Professional Alumni, 2010-2011]

SHARING CBYX EXPERIENCES

EQ1.4 Did alumni share what they learned/their experiences during the program with the community, family, and friends? What did they share?

CBYX alumni were often enthusiastic about sharing their program experiences with their networks. Ninety-eight percent of survey respondents reported sharing information about their experiences with their family, friends, and other community members upon completing the program, an experience that was echoed by many focus group and interview participants. Those who do not report sharing any details or only shared a limited amount of information about their experiences in focus groups or interviews were often high school participants who felt that their peers were often unable to relate to their experiences and preferred to discuss matters of mutual interest such as goings-on in their high school.

Survey responses reveal that the most popular method for sharing their experiences is through informal conversations with their own personal network of friends, family, and colleagues (98 percent). More than half (54 percent) of alumni went beyond informal conversations and made presentations to community, neighborhood, school, or university groups. Nearly one-third (28 percent) gave interviews to media (newspapers, television, radio, podcast).

The methods that alumni have used to share their CBYX experiences vary by decade of participation. Alumni from earlier cohorts (1980s and 1990s) were more likely to report giving presentations and media interviews. On the other hand, more recent cohorts (2015-2018) were more likely to share their experiences via postings on social media compared to alumni from the 1980s and 1990s cohorts (68 percent vs 40 percent). However, over time, regardless of decade of participation, the most common form of sharing is via informal conversations. In the past year, the majority of respondents shared information about their CBYX experiences in informal conversations with friends and family (84 percent of alumni from the 1980s to 1990s cohorts and 93 percent from the 2015 to 2018 cohorts) and informal conversations with colleagues and other professionals (64 percent of alumni from the 1980s to 1990s cohorts and 76 percent from the 2015 to 2018 cohorts).

In interviews and focus groups, alumni said that they share their experiences with as many people as they can. In particular, they stated that whenever they meet a young person within the age range of the program, they share information about CBYX and encourage



them to apply no matter the educational or professional background of the young person.

I definitely encourage every person that I meet to do CBYX, because no matter who you are, you're going to find a way to benefit from the program. I think that's really one of the great things is that it brings in people who are doing all sorts of things. We had people [in my year] who were welders, bakers, people who were still in university, people who had been working professionally for years. I definitely am always encouraging people to go for it. [Young Professional Alumni, 2016]

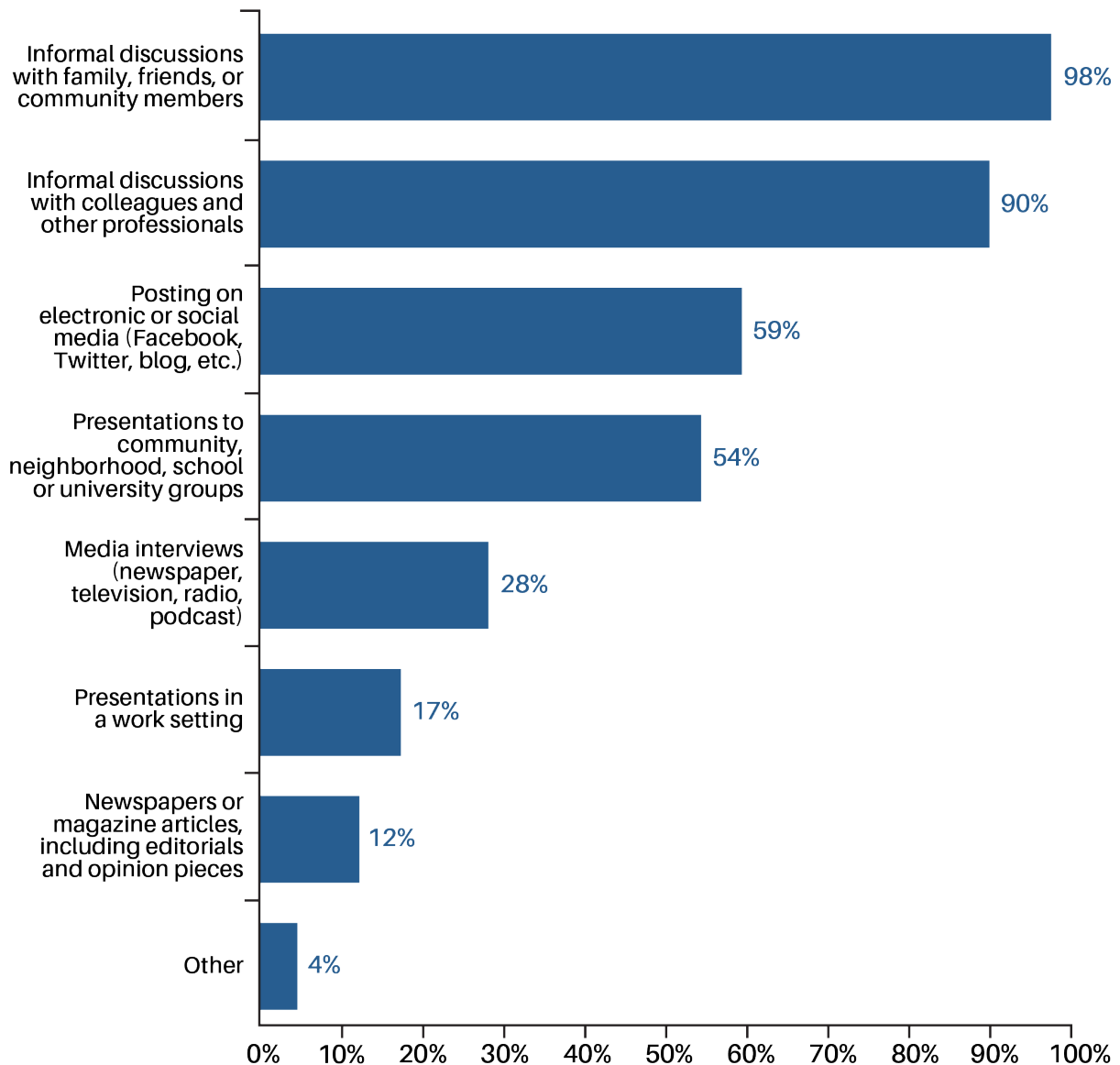
With the majority of surveyed alumni indicating they have shared their CBYX experience in multiple ways, it is not surprising that focus groups and interviews revealed that alumni were eager to share about their exchange experience upon their return home. For some, this enthusiasm has led to hopes that their family members and children will participate in the program one day. In fact, three alumni that participated in focus groups and interviews have children who have also participated in the CBYX program decades after their parents did. Two alumni also explained that sharing their positive exchange experiences encouraged their parents to host exchange students. Interviews with host families corroborated this finding with several host parents who reported that they decided to host German CBYX students because of the positive experience that a German host family provided for their own children during their CBYX exchange.

It also had a really awesome impact on my parents. Because when I came back, we had an exchange student at my high school, which we had never really had before. And she was from Switzerland, from the German speaking parts of Switzerland. And she had significant trouble with her first host family, and she ended up staying with my family for the remainder of her year. And so, if I would've never done my year abroad, I don't think my parents would've been open to that. [High School Alumni, 2010-2011]



Figure 5. Sharing CBYX Experiences

Have you ever shared your exchange program experience with others in any of the following ways? Please select all that apply.¹¹



N = 1,000 CBYX alumni from cohorts 1984-2018 across all three program components

11. Percentages show the total percentage of respondents that selected the skill listed, i.e., 98 percent of the 1,000 alumni that responded to this question selected “Informal discussions...” as one of their answers. Multiple selections were allowed.

HOST COMMUNITY FINDINGS¹²

Across focus groups, interviews, and survey responses, host community members reported important benefits for themselves, their families, and their schools. Similar to alumni, host community members reported increased awareness and appreciation of other cultures, a greater appreciation for diversity, and an increased exposure to new perspectives and ideas. Host families in focus groups and interviews reported establishing long-term relationships with German exchange students. Host school representatives stated that hosting German exchange students enriches the educational experiences of local students at their schools. Both groups reported knowing CBYX exchange students very well as a result of hosting.

One challenge reported by nearly all host families and host school representatives during interviews was the limited funding available for them. Those who have hosted German CBYX students reported that the experience is immensely valuable and impactful. However, compared with privately funded exchange programs, host families receive little to no financial support to participate, which can strain family budgets or discourage hosting due to the financial responsibilities required in that role. Host school representatives reiterated that they face barriers in identifying host families for German CBYX students due to the limited financial incentives. This may limit the number of host families that engage with and experience the benefits of the CBYX program. It also places additional burden on host school representatives to search for appropriate housing for exchange students.

HOST FAMILY EXPERIENCES WITH GERMAN EXCHANGE STUDENTS

EQ2 Has CBYX programming had an effect on American host families, schools, and communities?

12. This section summarizes host family and host school representative experiences hosting German exchange students from 30 in-depth interviews, three focus groups with 11 participants, and 495 survey responses from 339 host families, 43 host school faculty and staff, 22 community service hosts, and 26 host institution employees.

Host families felt that the experience of hosting a German CBYX student had a positive impact on their lives. Ninety-four percent of host families surveyed believed that hosting a German exchange student benefited their family. More specifically, 85 percent of surveyed host families reported benefiting from exposure to new perspectives or ideas and 83 percent from increased intercultural awareness. A majority of host families that participated in the survey also said their families benefited through greater appreciation for diversity (62 percent) and improved communication skills for family member (54 percent) (see further breakdown in Appendix 3).

Three host parents interviewed decided to host because their own children had participated in the CBYX program and enjoyed it. In addition, as a result of interacting with German CBYX exchange students, the children of several host parents have applied for and participated in the CBYX program or plan to apply when they reach the appropriate age.

Most of the host families interviewed hosted exchange students multiple times because they enjoyed the experience and found it to be rewarding for their whole families. However, several host families shared that they have either hosted multiple exchange students or students from other programs or countries and that it could be difficult to distinguish the defining benefit of hosting a singular student or type of student after hosting so many. This finding is also reflected in survey responses from 28 host family members out of 241 total respondents did not know if the German student that they hosted participated in the CBYX program.

CHANGES IN AMERICAN FAMILY DYNAMICS

Host families interviewed shared that, often, a lasting relationship was formed between their families and exchange students. In interviews and focus groups with host family members, they often described the students as their “kids” or as “part of the family.” Some have gone to visit their exchange students back in Germany and/or have hosted the exchange students’ parents for visits in the United States. During one interview with a host couple, they shared a video of the photo wall in their house to show the interviewer how each exchange student had their own unique photo collage, emphasizing the continuing relationships and close bonds they had been formed during their experiences hosting exchange students.

It was family, it was our definition of family for 32 years. [Host Parent, Michigan]

I had no idea I could be [so] crazy about these kids. I had no idea that they would become



family frankly, and that we would get their families [too]. I've been to visit Germany several times since this whole thing has started. I've stayed with their families, which was so much fun." [Host Parent, Ohio]

I cannot think of a better way to form relationships between countries. Like I literally cannot think of one. For the reasons that I already said: you are creating family. [Host Parent, North Carolina]

If you saw the texts, you'd see they [exchange students] address it to 'daddy' when they address the text. [Host Parent, Texas]

For some parents, seeing young German exchange students with such high levels of maturity encouraged them to have increased confidence in their own children and allow their children to take on travel and exchanges of their own. When asked, these parents said that they were not certain that they would have previously allowed their children to take such trips.

It was reassuring to see the confidence and the abilities of this girl who was barely a year older than my daughter knowing that I was going to send my 18-year-old to Europe for this summer. I was perfectly fine with it, which was a little bit shocking to me. I was less nervous than I thought that I should have been. [Host Parent, North Carolina]

I think as parents, we saw a level of independence that we don't see in other kids at that age. And it gave us some parenting skills as far as stepping back and giving them space and letting them fall, make mistakes, trusting them...And that was probably the only reason we allowed our daughter when she graduated high school to backpack Europe and Colombia, Ecuador, and all solo, as a young female. And I don't know that we would've supported or agreed to that. I think she was inspired a bit from our [host] student as well. [Host Parent, Colorado]

It was nice to be able to hear about life [in Germany]. [My daughter] is looking at CBYX's program for high school because she wants to experience it for herself. I don't know if I'll be ready to let her go in high school for a whole year away, but it'll be an amazing experience for her, and I wouldn't deny her or deprive her of it, if she got in. It's really awesome for her to think globally now ... She's always been interested in travel, because we travel a lot for conferences and stuff, but now she's not thinking just states, she's thinking the world. [Host Parent, Nevada]



Similarly, for two host parent couples who had no children of their own, hosting exchange students created their own unique parent-child dynamic. For these host parents, hosting CBYX students gave them the opportunity to establish their own parenting style and provided them with lasting bonds with students that they continue to maintain.

We were a young, married couple, we intended to stay married, and we needed something to focus on rather than just our individual selves, something that we could both focus on together. Creating those experiences for those students and having that student in our family gave us something that we could do together, rather than just going off and going our separate ways and just doing some things together, like roommates or something like that. When I said it becomes family, that's what we meant. [Host Parent, Michigan]

Since I don't have kids, it let me be a mom for a teenager, which I love. That's why I teach high school. I love teenagers, so it was nice having my own teenager here in the house. It was really nice, since I couldn't have my own. I felt like a real mom. [Host Parent, Kentucky]

Several host family members interviewed shared that their exposure to German exchange students resulted in changes for their family outside the context of the exchange, though this was not a universal experience. They shared that hosting sometimes subsequently affected the life trajectories of their own family members because it shifted their views of possible paths for themselves and their own families. One parent shared how her son, who had been homeschooled most of his life, decided to attend the local public high school upon seeing the levels of engagement their exchange student had at the school. Another shared that her daughter finally made the decision to study for her bachelor's degree in Europe after getting to know a CBYX student and forming a relationship with them. Although her daughter had previously been interested in study abroad, she believes that she would not have elected to complete a full degree abroad had she not created such a strong bond with the family's exchange students.

I'll tell you one very unexpected result of her coming here, was that our son had homeschooled from second grade all the way through ninth grade. And then I think in large part, because our exchange student was going to be enrolled at the local high school, he decided to give that a go and he enrolled and the two of them went to the school together. And I think it was just maybe the little push he needed to just give that time, and that worked out great. And if she had never come, I don't know that he would've taken that leap to give that a try after so many years of homeschooling, I think he might have stuck to his routine. [Host Parent, North Carolina]



I don't know if [my daughter] would be going to Europe [to study]. She always wanted to, but I think there is that security that she has sisters nearby. Who knows if that really would've happened? [Host Parent, Iowa]

Another host family, a gay couple, shared that they would not have decided to adopt had it not been for their positive experiences with the CBYX program. Before hosting students in the CBYX program, the couple did not feel confident that a child would want to live in a household with two fathers, rather than a household with a mother and a father. However, they explained that the CBYX local coordinator recognized their skill and penchant for hosting and recommended that they consider adoption. Without this encouragement, the couple never would have adopted their two children.

And we probably would've never adopted kids because the exchange students' coordinator was telling me, "You guys have hosted so many years, I see you all the time. Why didn't you adopt?" And I said, "No, we talked about that in our 20s. We thought they needed a mother and a father." And the lady said, "If you don't realize how many kids will never have a family, it's better to have two dads or two moms." And then we started. Took us two years to go through all the programs. We ended up fostering kids and then we ended up adopting two kids. We'd never have done that [otherwise]. [Host Parent, Texas]

Several host parents shared that hosting exchange students has had an impact outside of their immediate families. They discussed how bringing their host students to family or community gatherings helped create lasting friendships between CBYX exchange students and extended family and community members. One host parent shared how her niece met her exchange students over the years, became interested in cultures outside of her own, and has built friendships with individuals from diverse international backgrounds. Some were even successful in encouraging other friends or family members to host CBYX students in subsequent years because of their positive experiences hosting.

I will say that it has influenced other members of our family. Our very oldest niece grew up with our exchange students. Even though they were in a different town, whenever we would go back to visit, Christmas and Thanksgiving and all the rest of those things, she'd always meet our exchange students. When she went to university, she hung out with international students, she actually got a job where she was a housemother to girls from Japan and Korea who would come for the school's language program. They had a house and girls would come in and out and in and out for two-month, three-month programs, and she, during college, was their housemother. Then, she married a man from Ukraine and is now bringing up her children in a dual culture. [Host Parent, Michigan]



I feel like that there's impact outside of just him [the exchange student] and our family, [it's] a lot of him and the community. I think there's as much impact where he's integrated with our friends and things like that, where they have looked forward to seeing him when he came back or kind of building connections that way. [Host Parent, Georgia]

I've encouraged other friends to host and anytime we can get someone else to share that experience, I think it's well worth it for our families, their families, everybody, because why not get to know how other people in the world view things? [Host Parent, Iowa]

EQ2.1 Did hosting a German participant lead to increased understanding or interest in other cultures?

In interviews and focus groups, host families described overarching effects of hosting German exchange students as increasing their understanding or adding nuance to their previous understandings of other cultures and establishing long-term relationships with students.

A DEEP INTERCULTURAL EXCHANGE

American host families in focus groups and interviews shared that hosting German CBYX students allowed them to experience a deep intercultural exchange. Ninety-seven percent of host families surveyed reported that their time with CBYX participants allowed opportunities for cultural connections and sharing. Similarly, based on 231 survey responses from American host family members of, 86 percent felt that they experienced personal growth in their awareness of cultures other than their own, while 82 percent shared that they gained a better appreciation of cultures other than their own.

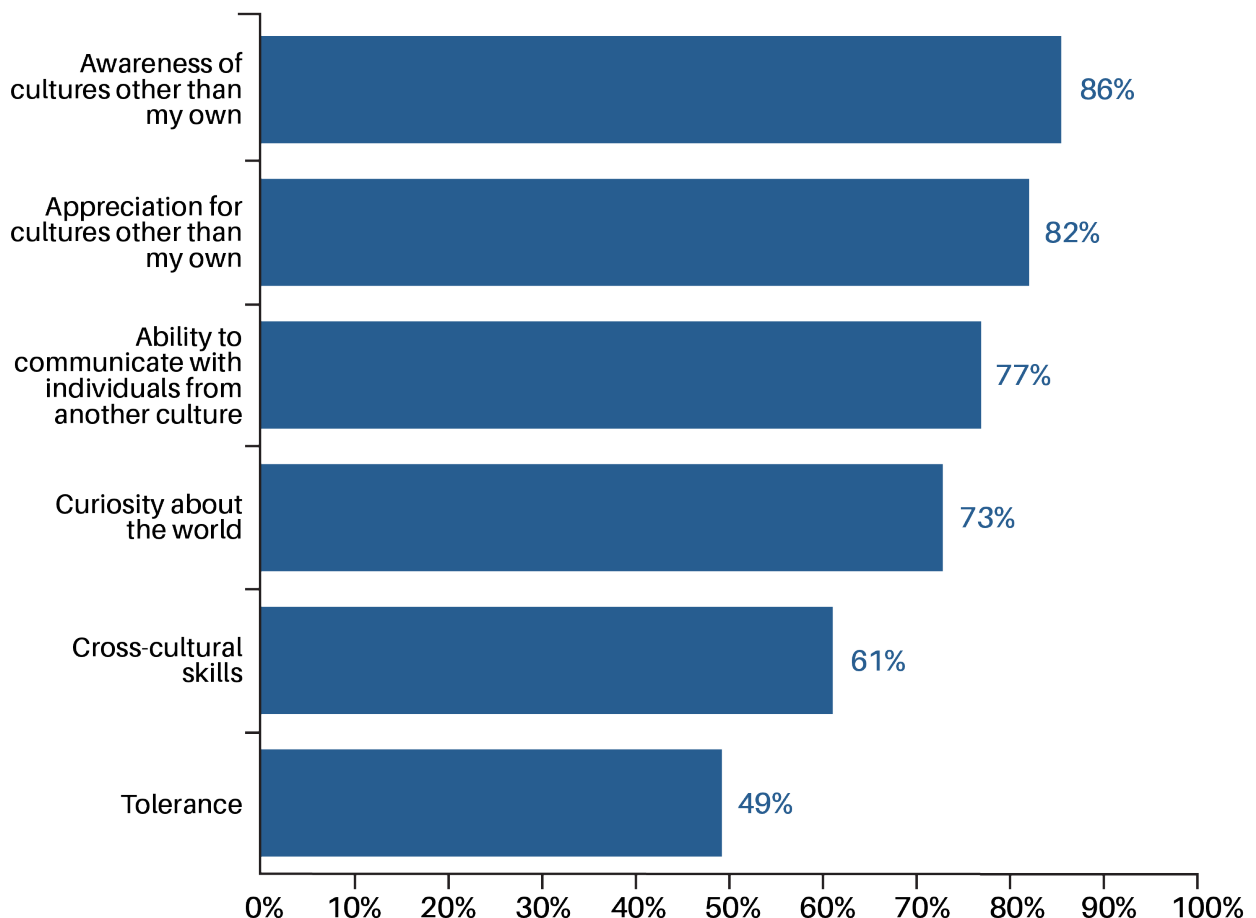
A common trend among those interviewed was that they often had children of their own around the same age as German students. Host families took on exchange students so that their own children could be exposed to young people from other cultures. However, some host families also said that they decided to stop hosting exchange students once their own children grew up and left the house, as their original intent was to expose their whole family to different cultures and perspectives.



We thought it would be great to have some experience of someone from Germany come and stay with us and have that cultural exchange. And I felt it important for my boys to be able to experience that as well. I'm a person that always likes to give experiences to other people. Both my boys were in scouting, so we camped a lot, and we traveled quite a bit. And having someone come to this country and for us to be able to show them Myrtle Beach and Disney World and all of these other things. These were great things for us to be able to show to him.
[Host Parent, Washington]

Figure 6. Host Family Personal Growth

In what areas did you experience personal growth as a result of your connection to CBYX program participants? Please select all that apply.¹³



N= 231 Host family members of German CBYX exchange students

13. Percentages show the total percentage of respondents that selected each aspect of personal growth listed, i.e., 86 percent of the 231 host family members that responded to this question selected "awareness of cultures other than my own" as one of their answers. Multiple selections were allowed.



Host families in focus groups and interviews further explained that they were able to learn more about the German culture while also having the opportunity to share unique aspects of American culture. Some host family members had never been out of the United States before hosting CBYX students or had limited exposure to international communities. They shared that they gained exposure to German culture through hosting. Ninety-seven percent of host families surveyed felt that hosting a German exchange student helped them better understand and gain an interest in the German culture. Additionally, several host families described how they learned more about the diversity within Germany by hosting multiple CBYX students and/or by hosting German exchange students of diverse backgrounds such as Turkish-German or Vietnamese-German students.

I think it was just great to open up the doors, open up our minds to other cultures. We haven't been able to travel much. We have an older daughter who's multiply disabled, so we can't just pick up and go anywhere. So, it was nice to be able to kind of virtually experience another culture without having to get in an airplane. [Host Parent, North Carolina]

I would say one thing that I've noticed over the years that has been interesting is that not all the German students are from German families, like [one CBYX student's] family. His father was Turkish. His mother was German. There was a student who was supposed to come this year, [whose] mother was from Czechoslovakia or Serbia. [But] there's more diversity [than expected]. Germany seems to accept lots of immigrants. That influences their population. Then they come here, and we get the German culture, and we get this other culture mixed. That's cool. [Host Parent, Virginia]

Host families also enjoyed being able to share the cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity found in the United States, and the distinct social and cultural aspects or practices in their own town and region. Host families who participated in this evaluation hail from a geographically diverse array of states, and many shared they were able to show their exchange students a unique facet of American culture that those students may not have ever been exposed to through media or traditional tourism. Similarly, 77 percent of host families surveyed reported that they grew in their ability to communicate with individuals from another culture, which may be related to the sharing of unique cultural aspects with their exchange students.

I think for me it was exposing someone from another country to kind of our life and our community and our school. And I think dispelling a lot of stereotypes ... I feel like we're in a really supportive, positive, diverse community that we were able to expose students to and see something in America that maybe isn't always in the headlines. [Host Parent, Colorado]



January 6th, [2021], our Germans were freaking out, absolutely freaking out about what was happening in the United States, so that weekend we had group Skype call with some of our kids. We had like eight or 10 of them on at the same time where we were telling them our view of what was happening in the United States, assuring them that no, things were not going to fall apart tomorrow, and just getting their perspective on what they're seeing, and they were getting our perspective on what we were seeing. We did two sessions of that with kids who had never even met each other before, but we had them all up on the screen and we were discussing political events. [Host Parent, Michigan]

I just love having these teenagers come to my home and showing them something really cool about Idaho. We have a lot of hot springs here. We take them camping, and that's something that most of the students haven't ever done. I love that they can experience something different and appreciate it and hopefully go home with a new understanding of something that they normally wouldn't get to experience. Just appreciate each other and what we learn from each other. [Host Parent, Idaho]

CBYX IMPACT ON ENHANCING AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES AND WORLDVIEWS

Many host families explained that hosting German exchange students did not radically change their worldviews, as many defined themselves as being relatively knowledgeable about world issues and other cultures before deciding to host exchange students. However, they described their experiences as opening their minds even more to other cultures and ways of doing things.

I don't know if I changed my mind. It was more informed. It gave me more information to work with... adding to that reservoir of information so that I felt reasonably capable to have a conversation. So, when our second German son came, I had an idea of how the system worked and how the state system in Germany works, and that it's very different from state to state on certain topics and not on others. [Host Parent, Ohio]

My family is already [made up of] people who want to travel. So, because we're already people who are interested in different cultures and travel in different countries, it just sort of added to that experience and knowledge that we already had. [Host Parent, Arizona]

I lived in my own bubble, and now that I've got so many different countries under my hosting experience, I guess I'm very much aware of the world, and I wouldn't have been if I hadn't hosted. [Host Parent, Louisiana]



Several host parents described how building relationships with German exchange students has increased mutual understanding and made them more empathetic of those that come from less privileged circumstances and those that are different from their own. Eighty-five percent of host families that responded to the survey reported an increased exposure to new perspectives and ideas through hosting. They also explained in focus groups and interviews that the experience has made them more understanding of international perspectives on world events. Several host parents discussed speaking with their host students about Germany's role in World War II and gaining a more nuanced (and non-American) perspective on it. They felt that this increased openness to learning more about other perspectives stems from the strong relationships they were able to build with their German exchange students. Eighty-six percent of host families who responded to the survey felt that they knew their CBYX exchange student well. They explained that having a personal connection to a culture, event, or country makes it feel much more relevant to one's own life.

How we portray Germany sometimes is not always in a good light because of World War II. I think it bothered her [exchange student] sometimes, and so it helped me to see how we can be more diplomatic about how we talk about a country that we've been in war with in the past, because she wasn't even born, and her parents probably weren't even born when that happened. They've moved on. [Host Parent, Idaho]

I think we were fairly open to other cultures and people before, but certainly now, because not only do we have these kids, but we have their families too and we keep up with the parents. So, it's like a whole wide world thing going on here. I guess it's helped to do further that belief that really we're all just people here doing our best to get along in the world. And I'm not all that interested in national divisions, I guess. So, if it was intended to do that, it's doing a heck of a job from my perspective. [Host Parent, Ohio]

I'd like to think that I am pretty knowledgeable of the world and Germany in particular, but yes. It's a rare opportunity to really get to know someone. You can travel for years, and you get to know people on a more superficial level or perhaps even as friends but hosting somebody it's like a family relationship and it's a wonderful opportunity to get to know someone. So, I'd say it's changed my worldview in the sense of, it broadened our family. I don't know how to say it any differently. It didn't change my worldview in the sense of understanding politics, or current events, or anything like that, but I think on a human level, it was a really big growth opportunity for both me and my husband. [Host Parent, North Carolina]



Ninety-three percent of host families who responded to the survey felt that they gained a better understanding of other cultures (other than German) as a result of their hosting experiences.¹⁴ Even though host families were asked only about their experience hosting German exchange students for the CBYX program, in focus groups and interviews, several host families explained that their curiosity about the world crossed over to other cultures as well, expanding their spheres of global interest and engagement. Several host families also share that they are now more interested in traveling and learning about other cultures in a way that they previously had not been. Survey results support this, with 61 percent of host families surveyed saying that they have traveled to Germany since participating as hosts.

I always try to be empathetic towards people, but I'm more empathetic now knowing that people come from different countries and things are different. When you come over here, there's a lot of culture shock. I wasn't really aware of the culture shock obviously because I'm here. My culture shock is going from here down to Tennessee and hearing everybody say, "Y'all." Big deal. But, the culture shock that other people have when they're actually coming from other parts of the world, I try to take that into consideration. Try to meet people a little bit more on where they are and try to be a little more empathetic towards what their experiences are, and what they're expecting, and what they know. So, that's been a big help for me. And in my position here as well, I'm the department chair, so I run this one department here at the school. [Host Parent, Pennsylvania]

I'm open to hosting more students and I want to go visit [Germany] now. I want to go, explore, and see the places she's [my exchange student] talked about. It helped me see ... I know there are other cultures, but I've been so embedded in my own Mexican-American experience that it helped me see that the same things can also happen coming from other countries as well, if that makes sense. [Host Parent, Nevada]

HOST SCHOOL EXPERIENCES WITH GERMAN EXCHANGES STUDENTS

EQ2.b Did American organizations benefit from German CBYX students working for and volunteering with their institutions? If so, how? If not, why not?

14. Although host families were asked to focus on experiences solely with German CBYX exchange students, several families in focus groups and interviews who had hosted students from multiple countries indicated that their perceptions could be impacted by the diverse array of students they had hosted.



Findings from interviews, focus groups, and survey responses of representatives of schools that hosted German CBYX exchange students demonstrate a positive impact on the institutions, students, faculty, and staff.¹⁵

Notably, 100 percent of host school representatives¹⁶ surveyed felt that hosting German CBYX students benefited their institutions. When asked about the benefits for their school from hosting German CBYX students, 92 percent of host school representatives reported that their school benefited from an increase in intercultural awareness by hosting a German CBYX exchange student.

Furthermore, 80 percent reported benefits in the form of exposure to new perspectives and ideas, 77 percent in greater appreciation for diversity, and 73 percent in a heightened interest in study abroad among students. In interviews, school representatives provided evidence showing some students applied for the CBYX program after meeting a German CBYX exchange student. One alumnus interviewed even shared that he was encouraged to apply for and participate in the CBYX program by a German CBYX exchange student attending the same technical school in Wisconsin.

I think overall CBYX is a very impactful program and is an integral part of building those bridges between countries. It's programs like this that really allow for those connections to continue to be made and to have that maintenance between ally countries, if you will. And it's really getting the people-to-people connection. Something like this should always exist and should exist between different countries, too. [Host School Representative/CBYX Alumna, Nevada]

INTERNATIONALIZATION AT HOME AND INCREASED EXPOSURE TO DIVERSITY

Many host school representatives interviewed worked for small, regional universities or community colleges and in relatively rural or remote communities across the United

15. Schools include high schools, community colleges, four-year universities, and technical schools attended by high school and young professional German CBYX participants. There are no American host schools for the vocational component because there are no German vocational participants.

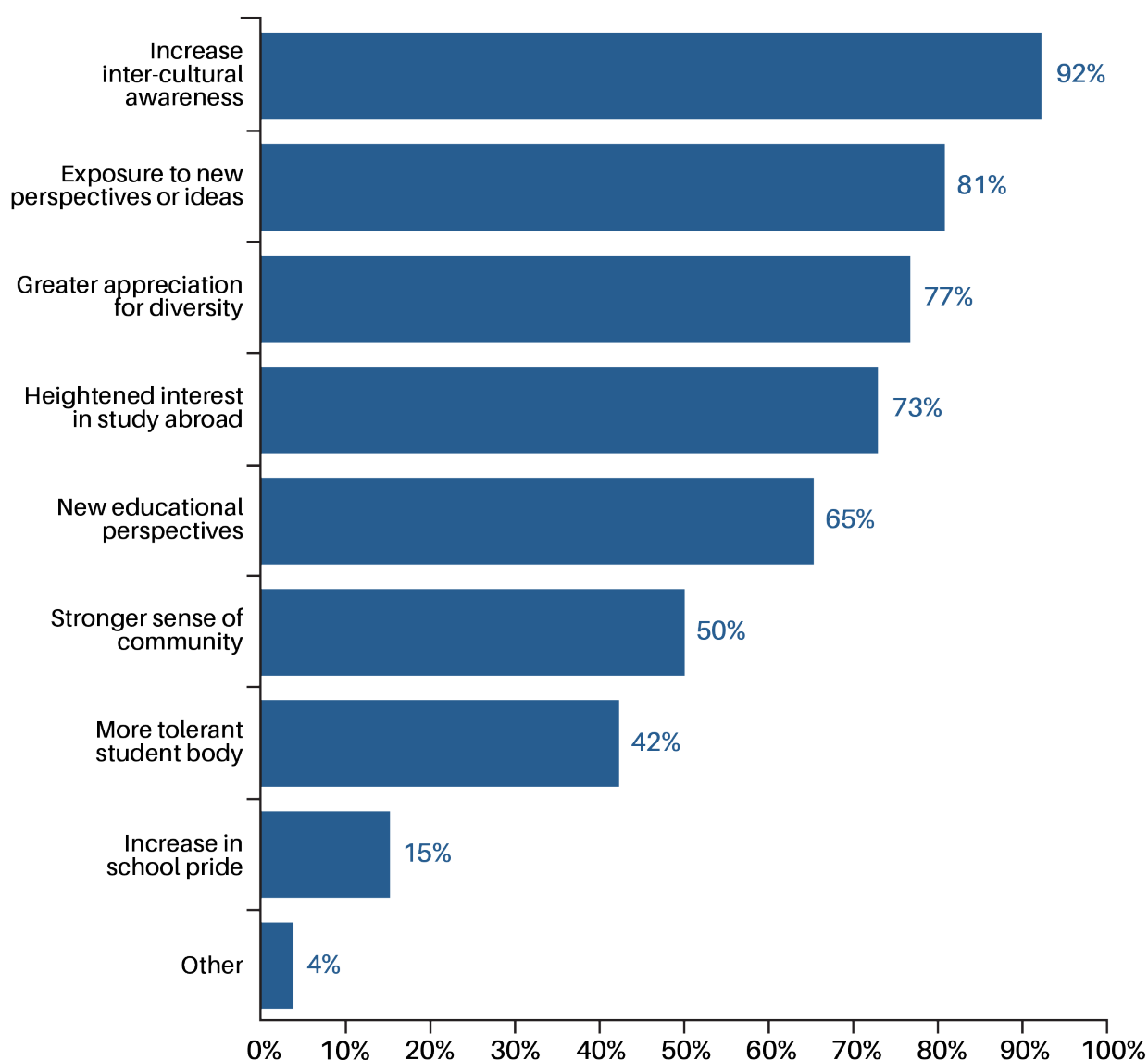
16. Host school representatives are faculty from the schools described above that manage student exchange programs, including the CBYX program, which includes setting up host families and acting as counselors for incoming exchange students. In this evaluation, all of the representatives that elected to participate in focus groups and interviews were from colleges and technical schools that hosted young professional German participants. For more information on outreach strategies utilized to reach a broad range of host school representatives, see Appendix 1: Limitations and Challenges.



States. When asked about the benefits of hosting CBYX students within that context, they universally described the value of bringing an international dimension to an otherwise generally heterogeneous student body and among students who mostly have not traveled far from the area.

Figure 7. Host School Benefits of Hosting

Did your school benefit in any of the following ways by hosting CBYX participant(s)? Please select all that apply.¹⁷



N= 26 Host school representatives of schools hosting German CBYX exchange students

17. Percentages show the total percentage of respondents that selected each aspect of personal growth listed, i.e., 92 percent of the 26 host school representatives that responded to this question selected "increase inter-cultural awareness" as one of their answers. Multiple selections were allowed.



The common thread is bringing diversity into these small communities that otherwise have no idea where Germany is, or what sauerkraut is, or any of that. [Host School Representative, Utah]

We are just here in our area in Northwest Montana. It's very, very non-diverse. And so having some cultural diversity really is a great addition to our program. So, the students are just presenting and giving an outside perspective to our really place-bound students who have not experienced a lot of cultural diversity in their lives. [Host School Representative, Montana]

The benefit is the same, no matter where they're [exchange students] from. You need experiences with people different from yourself. [This] is a regional university. Most of our students come from a five-county region. Some of these students have never been out of Tennessee. Or they've been across the border into Kentucky because Kentucky's right there next to us. But they don't have a global worldview. So, when you're sitting in the class with someone from another part of the world, it piques your curiosity, and you can see outside your backyard, and it helps with that. [Host Parent/Host School Representative, Tennessee]

This finding corresponds with survey responses showing that 97 percent of school representatives surveyed felt that hosting German CBYX students enriched students' educational experience. In focus groups and interviews, school representatives said hosting CBYX students can expose local students and host families to different kinds of people and new perspectives that they may not have had the opportunity to experience beforehand.

I think really that is the underlying reason of why the program exists, maintaining those ties between the U.S. and Germany and really helping people understand that the humanity between countries, as opposed to having those stereotypical views. I think having people like CBYX participants on campus really help broaden the American perspective ... That's a really big thing for community college students who may not have even ever left [the city], to meet someone who has that opportunity, and then also to talk to them about the program and let them know that they have that opportunity, too. Just having them here in general really enriches the overall diversity in the campus community. [Host School Representative, Nevada]

When we're looking to diversify our campus, one of the benefits is a program like this allows ... Because of educational systems, Europeans don't tend to choose to study as frequently in the United States as perhaps some other countries. And so, this is such a great way to add



the European mix into our student international population. We have expanded a presence in Europe, but these are students that traditionally wouldn't necessarily just say, "Hey, we're going to go to central Utah, and go study." Right? That has contributed, and that I think became a driving force." [Host School Representative, Utah]

Although responses from host school representatives in urban areas were more limited, there was still some evidence that those schools also gained exposure to new perspectives. One host school representative from an urban east coast community college described the benefits of linking German exchange students with local host families. She spoke about how, as she looked for host families for an incoming CBYX student, she asked her Jewish office mate if she would consider hosting. Her office mate rejected the request because of her associations with Germans and Germany and the persecution of Jews and other groups during the Holocaust. However, the office mate still suggested the idea to her daughter and grandson who accepted. Through the experience, the office mate built a strong relationship with the CBYX student and felt that she was another part of her family. She even went with her daughter and grandson to visit the exchange student's family in Germany. Hosting a German exchange student through the CBYX program gave this woman the opportunity to shift her perceptions of Germans. Afterwards, she worked to share what she had experienced and her change in mindset with other elderly Jewish people in her area.

My colleague had vowed she would never in her life go back to Germany again, but she went back to Germany with her daughter and her grandson, and they stayed with this young woman's family. It completely changed her mind set about the [German] descendants who had nothing to do with the original atrocities that happened in World War II. And I brought these two families together and so not only was there this kind of cross-cultural exchange, but it was a time for this particular Jewish family, to actually come to some type of healing. I saw the change in her and she talked about it and she visited other communities of elderly Jewish people and talked about her experiences. There was this kind of ripple effect, which I think helped her and probably some of her age mates reconcile their past. [Host School Representative, New Jersey]

One host school representative from Wisconsin drew a direct link between American student exposure to CBYX students and workforce readiness upon graduation. She argued that, in order to be successful in their future careers, students need to understand how to work with people from diverse backgrounds and who have differing experiences and perspectives. This is particularly important because the jobs available in the area where the technical college is located are often through internationally based businesses.



Hosting CBYX students at the college allows students to interact with people with different backgrounds and opinions and get prepared to work on diverse teams in the workforce.

These students need to be prepared how to work effectively with other cultures once they get outside of the college. And a lot of the classes don't have a global component. Students here are not required to take a foreign language. They don't have to do a study abroad. Having [exchange] students come in here and sitting next to somebody in a class, that helps them learn how to work with other people and how to accept other ideas or understand different positions. So, I think it would be a loss for the college [if CBYX students did not complete an exchange here], because they [American students] would not be as competitive with other people coming out of graduation. [Host School Representative, Wisconsin]

In certain instances, getting to know CBYX students has led to increased conversation about mutual topics of interest (particularly education) within hosting communities. One host school representative from Montana described how in recent years, the international student center has hosted student-led panels for faculty to describe and discuss educational practices in other countries. Most recently, a CBYX student has led the organization and management of this activity. Other representatives shared how faculty appreciate having CBYX students in the classroom to spark conversation and bring in different perspectives which can broaden local students' understandings of the topics at hand.

I think it brings a new energy to faculty. They're excited about it. It's a new conversation in the classroom and we talk to the students that "We want you to participate. It's not just sitting there and listening to the instructor, the instructor wants you to answer back, tell them what you're thinking," and stuff like that. And the students, they know coming in, they're here to share. And I think at least the faculty here enjoy that, that somebody's speaking up in class and sharing things and it gets those conversations going. [Host School Representative, Wisconsin]

We had a lot of conversation on Germany's response to COVID versus the United States' response to COVID conversations. And for me, I know every year my perspective of just something else changes and shifts just a little bit more in respect and appreciation of my own freedoms, and what I have, as well as perspective on potential improvements that could be had. [Host School Representative, Utah]

Survey responses complement the qualitative findings that show that there were



significant benefits within the hosting communities. When asked in what ways their organizations benefited from hosting CBYX students, nearly 80 percent of respondents said that it increased exposure to new perspectives and ideas, and 64 percent said that it exposed students, faculty, and staff to new educational perspectives. Host representations explain how the German students brought valuable international context and perspective to otherwise U.S.-focused discussions of history and politics.

[Instructors] really appreciated having [CBYX students] in class. One instructor that I spoke to was a history instructor. And she was very appreciative of their ability to talk about their government and politics and helping our students in the classroom have those discussions and share other perspectives ... It was very interesting to see our American students engaging in those conversations. And one of the students that I had in one of my classes is from Utah and she was going on and on about how speaking with [the CBYX students] and listening to those conversations, how she never understood or realized how complicated and how big the world was. And I know that those conversations occurred all the time throughout campus. [Host School Representative, North Dakota]

COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTIONS

All host school representatives also described a high level of involvement that CBYX exchange students have on campus and in the local community. They described these students as participating and taking leadership roles in various on-campus clubs and activities as diverse as student government to campus theater productions as well as volunteering in the community for cleanups or autism awareness fundraisers. The German students were active, skilled, and involved leaders in campus civic life.

We were blessed to have some students working on our campus. And our facilities crew were saying, "These are students that are irreplaceable. We wish they could stay longer if they were in our trades." They were building, and remodeling, and they were like, "The skillset of these students are incredible. [Host School Representative, Utah]

I can tell you about some of the [American] students that ended up going on the exchange side. We had one ... he was a student from Montana that has never been anywhere. He had never had a passport in his life and he met one of the exchange students in the CBYX program, got interested in the program, ended up applying. Ending up getting into the program. So, just by meeting somebody who was an incoming CBYX student basically generated a subsequent outgoing CBYX student who just mustered up the courage. [Host School Representative, Montana]



Several representatives shared that CBYX students have been integral in increasing engagement in campus international student organizations among the American students as well. In interviews and focus groups, host school representatives often reported that German CBYX students were not only active in student organizations but also successfully encouraged other exchange students to join clubs and activities.

One of the German exchange students was really pivotal in helping me get our international student group up and running. He was voted to be the president and he was very engaged in bringing students together and getting us making sure that students attended the meetings and kept everybody engaged. [Host School Representative, North Dakota]

Three years ago, in our student center, we had international flags. There was a display. Through a series of things, they were removed, and we had a group of students that was passionate that we get international representation back in our student center. To the point that they created a petition, gathered signatures. Our German students were right there helping to lead the charge. And it was that driving force that brought us to the point where now we've got just almost a better display up that's all encompassing, that includes every country we currently have represented on our campus, and they were part of that. I would say that's directly connected with them being part of the student population to push forward. [Host School Representative, Utah]

We have an international student organization, and domestic students, and all of our international students are part of it. Every year, our German students take leadership roles in that, and it's very impressive to watch them do this. And we have no public transportation, so it's nice to see that they [CBYX students] have to buy the cars, and they'll take students to go roller skating, or skiing, or to the parks that we have in the area...I also have more people involved in our international education week in November, since the German students really take over that, and they plan the daily activities. And I think since then, a lot more international students are coming out of their shells. [Host School Representative, New York]



CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation demonstrated notably consistent and positive findings. As citizen ambassadors, American CBYX participants represent the values and diversity of the United States. Similarly, German participants familiarize Americans with German culture and perspectives, broadening Americans' worldview. Participants and communities benefit from mutual understanding and the sharing of ideas. Analysis revealed that the CBYX program is meeting its goals.

ALUMNI EXPERIENCES

Overall, CBYX alumni across all components of the program state that the experiences (both positive and challenging, such as an immersion in a new foreign language and new culture) provided them with opportunities for personal growth, particularly in the areas of self-confidence, ability to communicate with people from other cultures, and ability to adapt to challenging circumstances.

Alumni also gained more technical abilities such as German language skills, teaching skills, program management and business management, and communication skills. They shared how they feel that these skills developed through their CBYX participation has set them apart from their peers in educational and professional settings — particularly young professional and vocational alumni who gain work experience in an international setting. Furthermore, they have been able to leverage these skills in both their personal and professional endeavors, such as communicating successfully on diverse teams or teaching German in American middle and high schools.

The specific areas of skill acquisition and use vary by program component, but skill development and application was evident across alumni from all components. Moreover, participants of different program components are in different stages of educational and professional life when they participate in the program, which may impact the kinds of skills that they acquire and use. That said, both soft and hard skill acquisition and application is steady across all decades of the program, indicating consistent program outcomes over the course of its 40-year history.

Alumni reported maintaining some connection to the CBYX program and to Germany after the program ends. This takes the form of regular communication with other alumni of the program, engaging with CBYXAA to maintain networks with peers who have gone through the program, and volunteering with program IPs to “give back” to the CBYX program. Alumni maintain connections to Germany through occasional communication with German host family members, the use of the German language professionally, or residing in Germany for school or work. That said, the application of German language skills and personal and professional connections to Germany varied widely from currently living and working in the country to speaking with friends and host family members from Germany every couple of months or years.

More recent alumni who responded to the survey were most likely (70 percent) to report having spoken with someone from their CBYX participation in the past month compared to alumni from the 1980s and 1990s cohorts (45 to 50 percent). Additionally, 56 percent of respondents reported being part of CBYXAA, and those who reported being members were 10 percent more likely than non-members to maintain five or more relationships from the CBYX program. This indicates that having an established organization dedicated to alumni engagement is associated with long-term networks between American CBYX participants and German friends and colleagues. In fact, the majority (48 percent) of alumni that responded to the survey reported continuing to receive information about CBYX through the CBYXAA, followed closely by the U.S. Alumni Newsletter (42 percent). Finally, high school participants were less likely than vocational or young professionals to be members of CBYXAA (47 percent versus 67 to 68 percent), which may reveal a need for improved outreach to high school alumni about the value of joining CBYXAA.

Moreover, alumni reported experiencing an increase in awareness and appreciation of cultures different from their own and an increased curiosity about the world as a result of participation in the CBYX program. The immersive nature of the program allowed them to view how different political and social structures (like the German welfare state) can be set up compared to the United States. On the other hand, they were also able to reflect on points of pride they have as Americans and freedoms and opportunities they are afforded in the United States.

Alumni were eager to share these experiences with family, friends, and others in their networks. Ninety-eight percent of alumni surveyed reported having informal discussions about their experiences within their networks. In focus groups and interviews, many alumni reported sharing their experiences with young people who may be eligible for the program to encourage them to apply.



HOST COMMUNITY EXPERIENCES

Host families and host school representatives of German CBYX participants reported largely positive outcomes from their participation in the program.

Host families felt that hosting a German exchange student strongly benefited their family. Host families also reported gaining exposure to new perspectives and ideas and increasing their awareness of other cultures through the CBYX program. In addition to learning about other cultures, many host families in interviews and focus groups shared that they valued the opportunity to share unique aspects of American culture with the exchange students that are not as visible in the media. Because of this, many described experiencing a true intercultural mutual exchange where both parties were able to introduce the other to their own culture. Most host family members interviewed described their exchange students like their own children and kept in regular contact with them.

Several host parents shared that hosting exchange students has had an impact outside of their immediate families. They discussed how bringing their host students to family or community gatherings helped create lasting friendships between CBYX exchange students and extended family and community members. One host parent shared how her niece met her exchange students over the years, became interested in cultures outside of her own, and has built friendships with individuals from diverse international backgrounds. Some were even successful in encouraging other friends or family members to host CBYX students in subsequent years because of their positive experiences hosting. These sorts of experiences conveyed by host family members hint at a possible spillover effect of the positive effects of the exchange experience in their wider communities.

Young professional host school representatives communicated that hosting German CBYX students benefited their institution. Host school representatives highlighted that having exchange students on campus enriched the education of local students. They explained that hosting exchange students integrated an international dimension in study and activities outside school and expanded students' horizons by increasing intercultural awareness of and curiosity about global issues to which they would not normally be exposed. This was particularly true for representatives from host schools in rural areas or areas that have low tourism rates or international presence. Additionally, host school representatives in interviews and focus groups described how exchange students increased engagement in student clubs and activities by taking on leadership roles and encouraging other students (particularly other international students) to join. Exchange students' engagement at the host schools spreads awareness of opportunities like CBYX,



and host school representatives shared that exchange students often encourage American students to apply to the CBYX program.

Overall, the evaluation found that the CBYX program has had strong positive impacts on students, host families, and host schools and has resulted in long-lasting benefits on both personal and professional lives of alumni. The findings demonstrate that the program has served as a catalyst for generating new ideas and perspectives on world issues, new ways of collaboration and engagement across cultures, and new and expanded worldviews of alumni and host community members.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The analyses of data collected from survey responses along with qualitative findings from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions revealed that the CBYX program has had long-lasting impacts on American participants and the U.S. communities that hosted German participants. To continue to build on the success of the program, several key areas could be considered to ensure even higher participant satisfaction and long-term impact.

- **Continue to implement the CBYX program with the strength and commitment it has demonstrated to date.** Alumni and community members express their belief in the power of CBYX to create meaningful and long-lasting positive change and share their wish that many future participants are able to benefit from the experience.
- **Expand upon existing outreach methods to reach new potential participants** from communities and schools that may have not previously engaged with the CBYX program. Leverage CBYX's existing excellent reputation, outreach expertise, and social media presence to build wider awareness of the program.
 - **More awareness of the program may also allow for more inclusive recruitment as a broader range of people apply,** include those from more marginalized communities and those that may not have access to information about study abroad programs and the benefits it may bring. Findings show that CBYX name recognition is often limited to those who know someone who has participated in the program or who already have a strong existing connection to Germany or the German language. Expanded outreach to communities, students, and young professionals unaware of the program may bring a wider pool of potential participants.
 - **Utilize first-hand accounts and data produced from the evaluation in outreach** to show potential participants what they can expect and the benefits they may experience by participating.
- **Optimize the program's digital footprint.** Implement federal guidance on Search Engine Optimization (SEO) for the CBYX website and online resources to reach more potential program participants. SEO is a back-end component of building an effective website that does not require paid advertisement and, in fact, has cost-saving benefits, according to the U.S. General Services Administration. SEO entails multiple

elements, including using keywords that internet searchers are likely to use, tailoring the length of each page strategically, incorporating links to and from other trusted sources of information, and making text and visual content as clear as possible. Combined, these elements improve where a website appears in a list of online search results, thereby driving traffic to the site.

- **Consider increasing funding for the program to improve inclusivity and program outcomes.** Alumni and host community members often advocated for increased funding for the program, which will open existing opportunities for individuals who have not previously been engaged and enable increasingly sustainable participation in CBYX from diverse student and young professional populations. This would also reduce stress and hardship for participants with less means, allowing them to engage more fully with the program. It may also diversify host family options for German CBYX students.
 - **Consider providing additional funding for stipends of American participants,** to enable participants, especially those from marginalized and/or lower-income groups who may not have family resources to draw on, to fully engage with local German communities outside of program-funded activities. Additionally, work with IPs to prepare standardized, consistent guidelines on what participants typically need to pay for out of pocket while in Germany.
 - **Provide/increase monthly stipends for host families.** Families that host students must be financially stable enough to do so. Currently, high school hosts receive no financial support for hosting a student, and young professional hosts receive a very small stipend. A hosting stipend will make hosting more equitable and accessible, facilitating the opportunity to host families who previously saw hosting as cost prohibitive. The appropriate stipend amount should be informed by additional data collection from IPs who maintain close contact with host community members. Any visa regulations or other protocols that prohibit stipends for host families should be reviewed and reconsidered. This will improve inclusivity among host families; reduce burden on host school representatives, IPs, and ECA to find hosts for German CBYX students; and potentially improve the community-level effect of the program.
- **Increase alumni engagement to support continued benefits of the CBYX program experience after participation ends.** In focus groups and interviews, alumni often discussed their desire to maintain connections with their fellow cohort participants. Formal alumni engagement platforms and regular opportunities for contact can revitalize these networks and give alumni opportunities to continue the learning and connection that they experience within the program. Continued engagement benefits both the alumni themselves and strengthens the program's reach and impact through the continued network and maintained connections. The following specific recommendations detail methods for accomplishing this:



- **Leverage the existing ECA Alumni Office contact database system (ACES) to build out and regularly maintain participant records and contact information.** More recent alumni were easier to contact than alumni from earlier years of the program, as contact information (email addresses and phone numbers) from earlier years are either limited or defunct, most likely due to changes in contact information over time. A comprehensive and regularly updated contact list maintained by ECA will be important to continue to include alumni from all years of the program in program updates. Additionally, maintaining contact information for host families, schools and institutions will allow for more regular contact with these groups to update them on any relevant events, such as the upcoming 40-year anniversary. Ideally, the maintenance and regular update of these contacts list for submission to the CBYX program team should be part of the reporting requirement for all IPs for the award.
- **Continue to work to support exchange participants in preparing them for the exchange and upon their return,** including providing additional support for participants as needed. This could include the creation of a mentoring system and/or the addition of a second mid-year check. It could also include expanding post-program support through virtual check-in event(s) a few weeks or months after the post-program activities in which alumni can share about their reintegration experiences. ECA may provide standardized best practices on incorporating virtual check-ins as an alumni engagement strategy. This will help to support alumni through reverse culture shock and give them the opportunity to talk through any difficulties they have experienced during and after the program with peers.
- **Continue to collaborate with the alumni-founded CBYXAA on alumni engagement opportunities,** particularly to engage high school alumni, who are less likely to be members of CBYXAA.
- **Continue to use existing data collection mechanisms and invest in further research** to better understand the experiences of CBYX participants and determine recommendations on how to continually improve participant outcomes and program satisfaction. By using existing mechanisms such as the Monitoring Data for ECA Framework, a bureau-wide performance monitoring framework, and participant feedback collected by IPs, ECA can identify areas of immediate need as well as areas that might need further research or conversations with alumni.



APPENDIX 1. EVALUATION DESIGN, METHODS, AND LIMITATIONS

EVALUATION METHODS

SURVEY METHODS

Data Collection

The survey was programmed and administered through Qualtrics and was active from mid-April to mid-July 2022. A total of five biweekly reminders were sent out by Qualtrics using a standardized script to gather as many responses as possible during the time that the survey was active. Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange (CBYX) implementing partners (IPs) also sent out three reminder requests to complete the survey to their alumni networks.

QUALITATIVE METHODS

Data Collection

Qualitative fieldwork occurred in five waves broken out by cohort type: 1) alumni 2015-2018 cohorts, 2) alumni 1984-1999 cohorts, 3) alumni 2000-2009 cohorts, 4) alumni 2010-2014 cohorts, and 5) host families and host school representatives. Alumni cohorts were broken up in this way to account for the relative amount of viable contact information for alumni in the contact database. For example, very little up-to-date contact information existed for cohorts from the 1980s and 1990s. Therefore, outreach to these cohorts was grouped together to obtain the largest number of interviewees and focus groups participants from the aggregated lists.

For interviews, researchers initially aimed for 32 alumni and 36 host community interviews. For focus groups, researchers initially aimed for 12 alumni focus groups and six host community groups. Across all interviews and focus groups, researchers aimed for a balance of genders, and focus groups were split by program type: a) high school, b) vocational, and c) young professionals. Due to the similar structures of the vocational and young professional programs and the difficulty obtaining vocational alumni sign-ups, vocational and young professional groups were merged. Interviews were still split across the three program types.

During each wave, the outreach coordinator sent a total of three requests for an interview to each individual on the contact list, and interviews were filled on a first-come, first-served basis, keeping in mind the gender and program balance for each cohort. Once interviews had been filled, additional interviewees were invited to participate in focus groups and/or be placed on a waiting list if any scheduled interviewees did not attend. Most focus groups were filled with these additional interviewee lists, but the outreach coordinator sent at least one request for participation email to all cohort lists.

Due to difficulties contacting and signing up alumni from the 1980s and 1990s cohorts, only one focus group with alumni from these cohorts was conducted. Instead, seven additional in-depth interviews were conducted with alumni from these cohorts.

DATA ANALYSIS

The DCG Communications team analyzed data through an iterative process during and after fieldwork. Analysis first examined the findings from the qualitative research and then the quantitative survey data in Qualtrics.

Initial analysis of focus group discussions and interviews began during the data collection process. After each focus group and interview, the primary researcher wrote key takeaway notes to document the main themes from each conversation as well as highlight any points of discussion worth noting in subsequent groups and interviews. This process was done purposefully to keep a record of high-level takeaways in each discussion to reference since there was such a high volume of focus groups and interviews conducted.

Once data collection was complete, researchers used a two-step qualitative coding process. Researchers first created an Excel spreadsheet broken out into individual sheets by evaluation questions. The sheets were first populated using the main themes identified in the key takeaway documents. Next, researchers individually coded the transcripts from focus groups discussions and interviews, pulling quotes that supported the main themes as well as quotes representing contradictory opinions. Building the coding document was an iterative process. Through focused coding, researchers identified additional themes and subthemes, which were then built into the coding document.

Data was analyzed in Qualtrics using the Reporting and CrossTabs features. Researchers then triangulated the qualitative and quantitative data, analyzing the data in tandem, which allowed the findings from each data set to inform and explain findings across data types for each evaluation question. The survey results were disaggregated by program type then



demographics such as gender and year of participation, where appropriate, to examine if certain findings applied more or less to certain groups.

LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES

The evaluation had several limitations, described below.

LIMITATIONS OF NONRESPONSE BIAS

Because this research relied on a voluntary response sample of program beneficiaries, it is possible that those alumni and host community members who responded to the survey and expressed interest in participating in interviews and focus groups were the most engaged with the program. Therefore, the findings may not be representative of all program participants. However, researchers utilized multiple techniques to ensure the highest response rate for each method, including reminder emails for surveys distributed by Qualtrics and program IP and reminder emails for interview and focus group sign-ups. Additional strategies to increase response rates can be found in the following sections.

Contact Database

In preparation for this evaluation, researchers gathered and merged contact databases for alumni, host families, host school representatives, and host organizations from the ECA Alumni Office and the CBYX program IPs. These databases were used to contact program participants to participate in the evaluation survey, interviews, and focus groups. However, the databases were not fully populated or contained outdated contact information, particularly for alumni from earlier years of the program.

To bolster the alumni database list, researchers first created a Google Form to submit contact information to be distributed by IPs. Implementing partners emailed this Google Form to their alumni contact lists requesting that they pass the form along to others whose information may not be in IP contact lists. The Google Forms yielded over 900 responses, about half of which were new contacts not found in the existing database, which may have improved alumni reach.

The contact lists for host families and host school representatives had fewer numbers than those of alumni, as many schools and families host international students multiple times.

Finally, evaluators learned that it was extremely difficult to maintain the listing of the host organizations where German CBYX students had volunteer work or professional



placements since German participants had diverse interests and, therefore, different organizations were selected each year to accommodate students' interests.

Qualitative Research Attrition

Similar to limitations of nonresponse bias, attrition in focus group and interview attendance was much higher among host community members than alumni. To improve attendance rates, researchers sent two reminder emails to participants: one a week before the interview or group and one the day before the interview or group. Ultimately, only three focus groups were conducted (two with host families and one with host school representatives) when the original six planned groups could not be filled. This may have impacted the breadth of findings from host community groups.

Survey Response

Originally, the survey aimed to acquire n=8,400 respondents. All respondents were going to be offered a \$5 USD incentive for their participation. Due to federal restrictions on the use of automated incentive services, the survey proceeded without an incentive, which may have had a negative impact on the number, type, and quality of survey responses.

Program Name Recognition

Host community members, particularly host families, often associate their hosting experience with the program IP (e.g., AFS, NACEL, Cultural Vistas) because those partners corresponded with them about hosting and provided them with orientation and support throughout the hosting process. Additionally, some families host students from multiple exchange programs and cannot always remember the program titles. Host families who had hosted multiple CBYX students were more likely to recognize the program title. Therefore, name recognition of the CBYX program and ECA was lower than anticipated. Additionally, all host school representatives who expressed interest in participating in focus groups or interviews worked at institutions that host young professional German CBYX exchange students. None worked at high school institutions. It is unclear why this discrepancy occurred. Because of these challenges, researchers had to adjust outreach strategies and messaging to further engage participants.

First, the creation of buy-in and support from IPs was critical to successful outreach to host community members. When host families or host school representatives were skeptical of research outreach emails, they were able to contact their IP to confirm that it was a legitimate evaluation. (This happened only on a handful of occasions.) Second, outreach periods for these cohorts were extended from the standard two weeks to three weeks to allow more time to fill interview and group slots. Next, researchers divided email outreach



by the IP with which each host community member was associated. They also altered subject line language to read “Feedback on Hosting German Exchange Student” rather than “Feedback on Hosting CBYX Student” and included in the email body a reference to the host community member’s association with the specific IP. When this change was made to outreach tactics, there was an increase in host community member responsiveness to requests for interviews or focus group participation.



APPENDIX 2. PARTICIPANTS IN THE EVALUATION

Table 1. Breakdown of Interview Respondents-Alumni

Cohort	Program Type	Interviews Planned	Total Interviews
2015-2018	High School	3	3
	Vocational	3	2
	Young Professional	2	3
2010-2014	High School	3	3
	Vocational	3	2
	Young Professional	2	3
2000-2009	High School	3	4
	Vocational	3	1
	Young Professional	2	2
1984-1999	High School	3	8
	Vocational	3	2
	Young Professional	2	6
Total		32	39

Table 2. Breakdown of Interview Respondents-Host community members

Cohort	Interviews Planned	Total Interviews
Host Family	18	21
Host School Representative	9	9
Host Community Member	9	0 ¹⁸
	32	39

18. See Evaluation Design, Methods, and Limitations section for explanation for change of this qualitative component.

Table 3. Breakdown of Focus Group Respondents-Alumni

Cohort	Program Type	Focus Groups Planned	Participants Per Group	Focus Groups Completed
2015-2018	High School	1	6	1
	Vocational	1	4	1
	Young Professional (YP)	1	4	1
2010-2014	High School	1	4	1
	Vocational + YP	1	4	1
	Vocational + YP	1	4	1
2000-2009	High School	1	4	1
	Vocational + YP	1	4	1
	Vocational + YP	1	4	1
1984-1999	High School	1	3	1
	Vocational + YP	1	-	0
	Vocational + YP	1	-	0
Total		12		10

Table 4. Breakdown of Focus Group Respondents Among Host Community Members

Cohort	Focus Groups Planned	Participants Per Group	Focus Groups Completed¹⁹
Host Families	1	4	1
	1	3	1
	1	-	0
Host School Representatives	1	4	1
	1	-	0
	1	-	0
Host Organization Representatives	1	-	0
Total	6		3

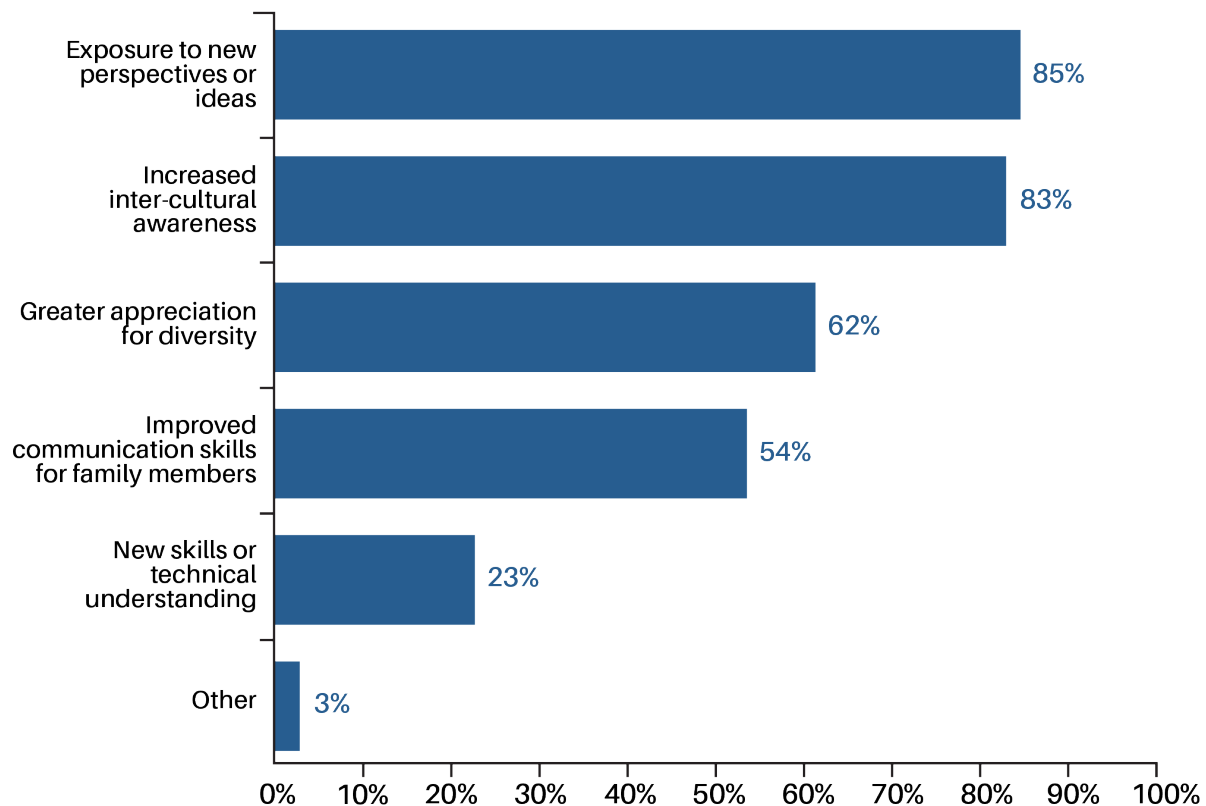
19. See technical reporting for explanation of change in focus group number for host community members.



APPENDIX 3. ADDITIONAL GRAPHS AND CROSSTABS

Graph 1. Top Five Benefits for Host Families

Did your family benefit in any of the following ways by hosting CBYX participant(s)?
Please select all that apply.²⁰



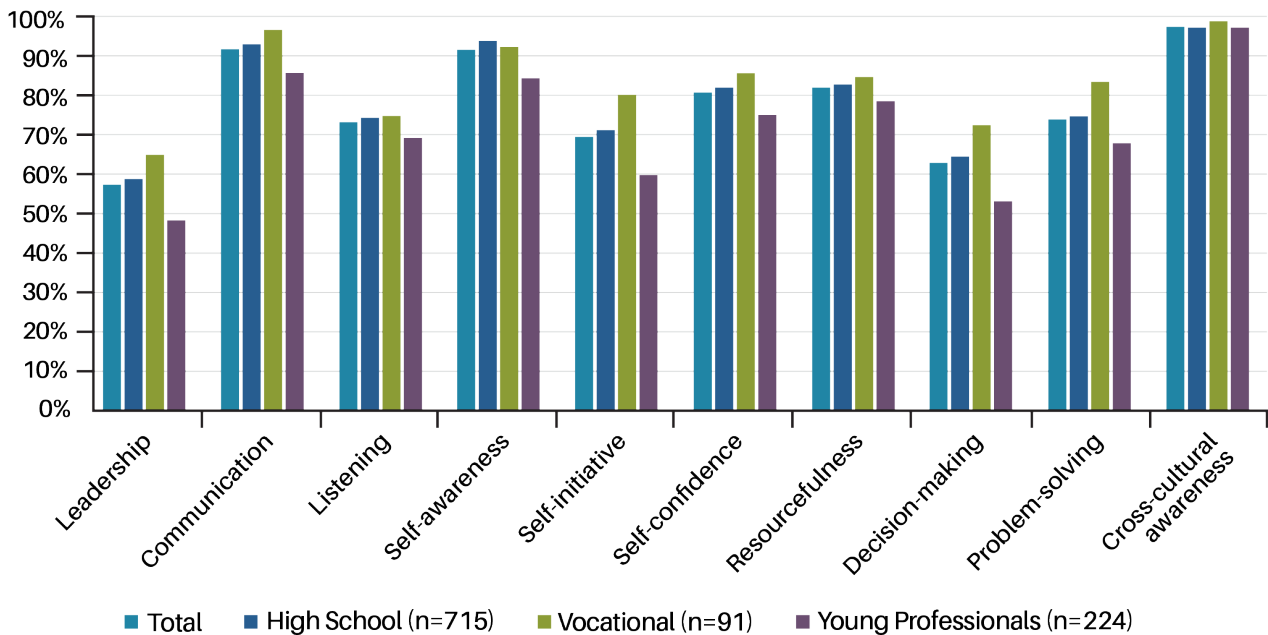
N= 268 Host family members of German CBYX exchange students

The following graphs shares key findings broken out by program type and program decade of participation.

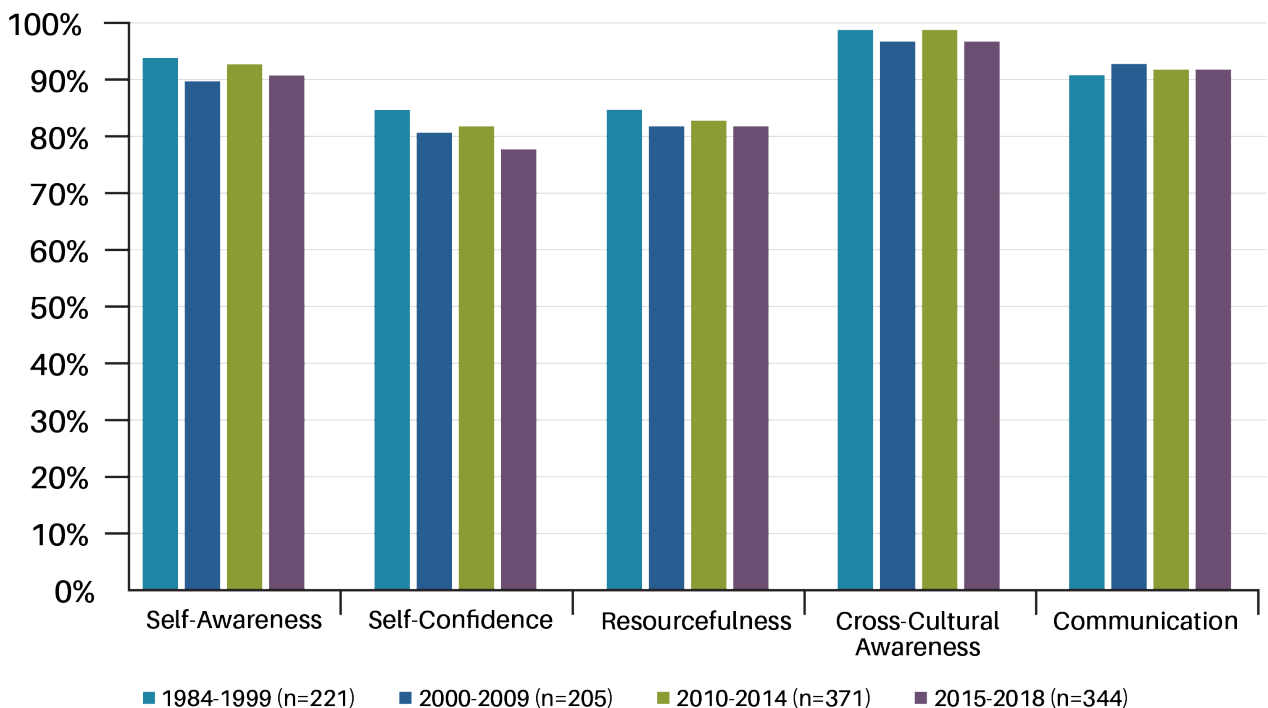
20. Percentages show the total percentage of respondents that selected each benefit listed. I.e., 85 percent of the 268 host family members that responded to this question selected “exposure to new perspectives or ideas” as one of their answers. Multiple selections were allowed.

Graph 2. Soft Skill Acquisition by Program Type

Do you feel that you have increased your skill level in any of the following areas as a result of participation in this program? Please select all that apply.

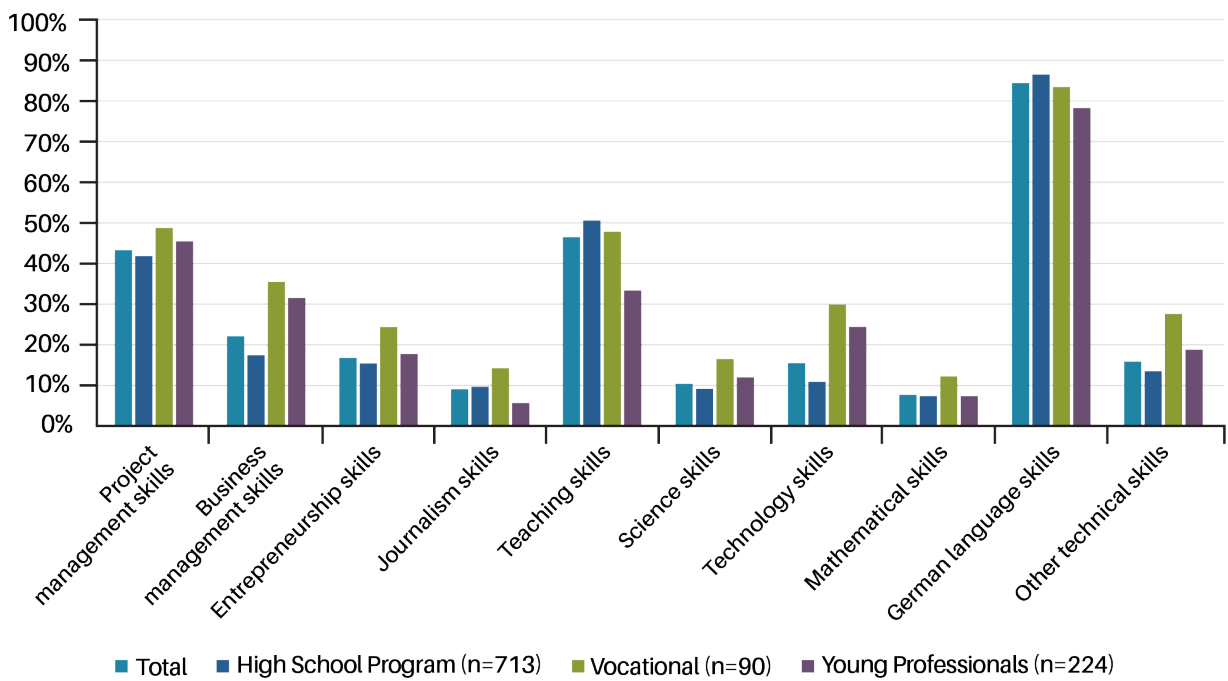


Graph 3. Top 5 Soft Skill Acquisition by Decade of Participation

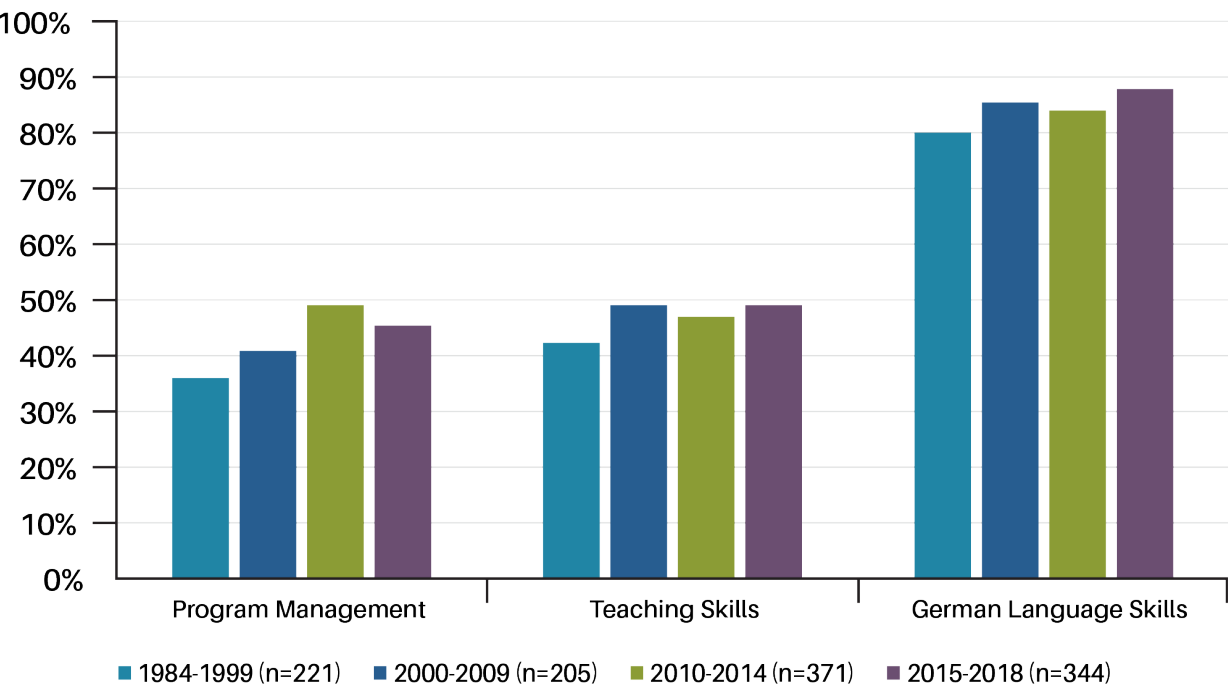


Graph 4. Skill Application by Program Type

Have you been able to apply any of the following skills you gained from the program to your professional life? Please select all that apply.

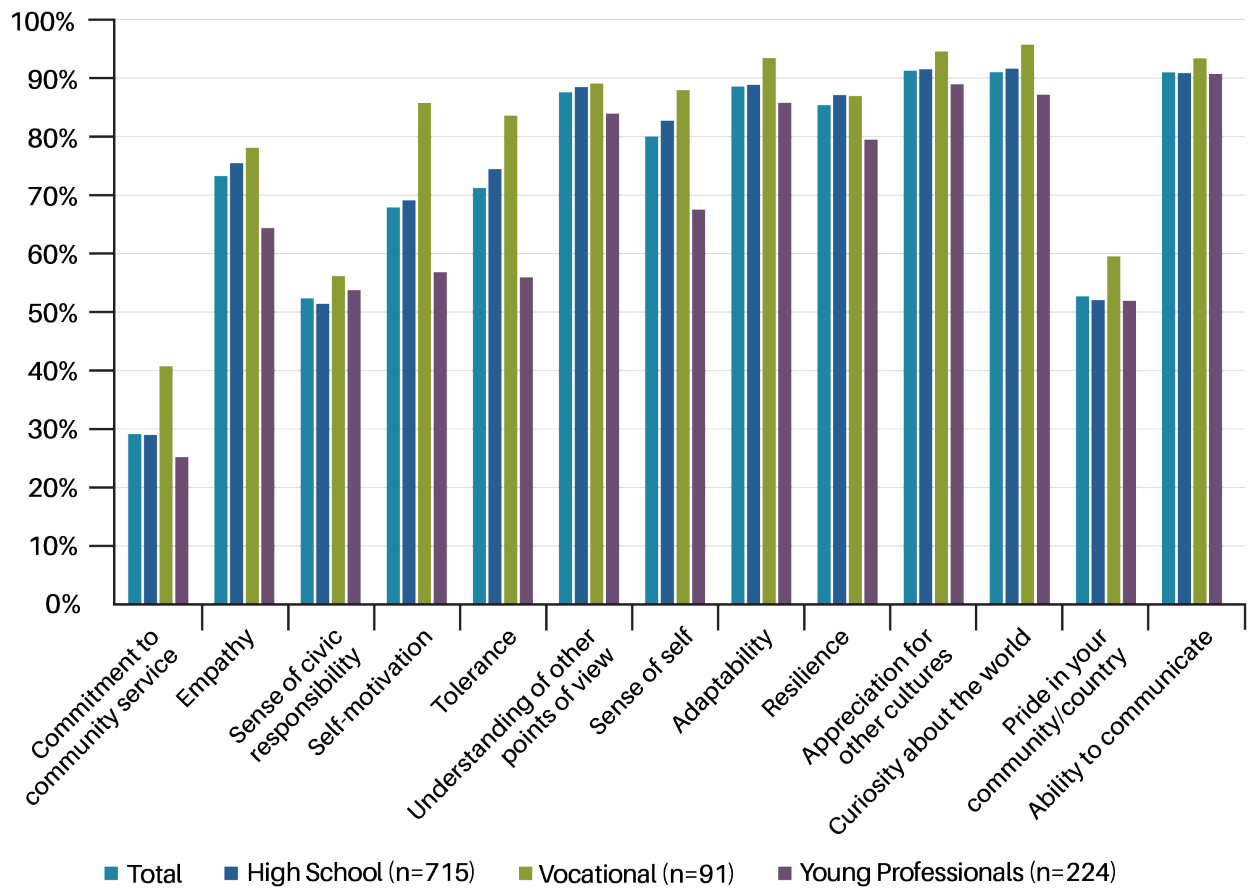


Graph 5. Top 3 Skill Application by Decade

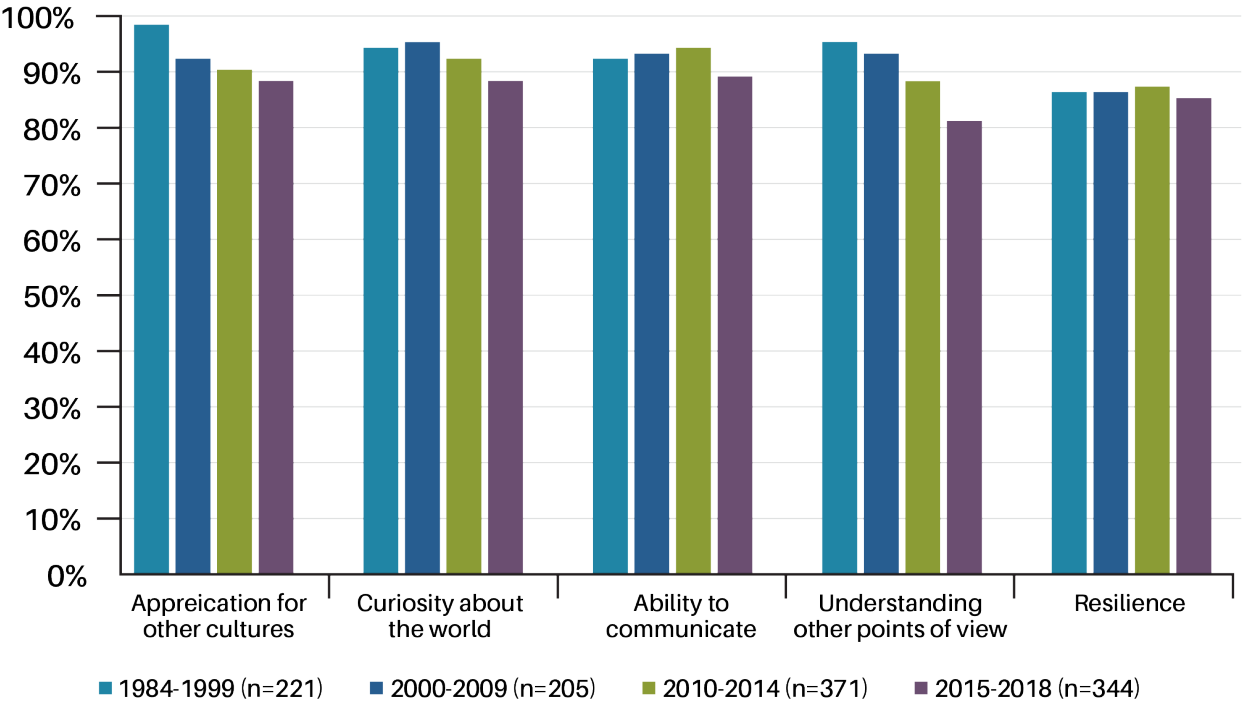


Graph 6. Acquisition of Personal Growth Indicators by Program Type

In what areas did you experience personal growth as a result of your participation in the program? Please select all that apply.



Graph 7. Top 5 Acquisition of Personal Growth Indicators by Decade



ABOUT THE MONITORING, EVALUATION, LEARNING, AND INNOVATION UNIT

The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs' (ECA) Monitoring Evaluation Learning and Innovation (MELI) Unit has been at the forefront of the Department of State's monitoring and evaluation (M&E) efforts since its creation in 1999. Throughout its 20 years, the MELI Unit has built a robust M&E system to ensure that ECA program staff and senior leadership benefit from timely performance data that they can utilize for evidence-based decision-making.

For a complete listing of ongoing evaluation projects, an archive of completed reports, and resources for conducting evaluations, visit the MELI Unit's website: <https://eca.state.gov/impact/eca-evaluation-division>.

If you would like additional information or have any questions, please contact us at ECAevaluation@state.gov.



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