

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 22, 2025

The Honorable Lindsey Graham
Chairman
Subcommittee on the Department of State,
Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Brian Schatz
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on the Department of State,
Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Graham and Ranking Member Schatz:

Thank you for your continued support of U.S. Department of State educational and cultural exchange programs, which are a proven and cost-effective way for the United States to remain internationally competitive, advance our interests around the world, and make us stronger by creating future American leaders and sharing our nation's story with emerging leaders around the world. These programs make America safer, stronger, and more prosperous. We request that you continue Congress' long bipartisan support for the State Department's educational and cultural exchange programs by appropriating \$741 million, keeping funding at the same level as FY25, in Fiscal Year 2026.

With Congress' support, a range of State Department exchange programs connect emerging leaders, entrepreneurs, youth, educators, and athletes from the United States to their counterparts in more than 155 countries around the world, dramatically increasing America's global reach. Exchanges are a key instrument in the U.S. foreign policy toolbox and essential to strengthening U.S. global leadership, while building respect and partnerships based on shared interests and mutual ties around the world that contribute to America's safety, security, and prosperity. Results repeatedly show that participants visiting the United States through exchange programs return to their home countries with a better impression of our country, the American people, and our values. U.S. ambassadors consistently rank exchange programs among the most useful catalysts for long-term political change and mutual understanding.

Exchange programs increase America's global influence and increase the safety of Americans here at home and abroad. More than 1.7 million leaders around world are alumni of U.S. exchange programs, and upon returning home, 87% to 98% of alumni spread positive messages about their experience in the U.S. through their networks. According to the State Department, more than 660 current or former heads of government, and 42 current or former Members of Congress have been on a State Department exchange program.

Additionally, exchange programs are flexible tools to achieve the Administration's policy priorities such as creating a united and economically prosperous Western Hemisphere via exchanges with Canada, Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean. These programs help America with its strategic engagement and countering China via exchanges with Chinese students, professionals, and diplomats. Finally, through exchanges, the United States has growing influence in South America via programs with Peru, Brazil, Argentina, and more.

Exchange programs strengthen all parts of American society. Support from Congress allows the State Department to strategically align its programs with key U.S. foreign policy interests and to facilitate exchange experiences for more than 55,000 American and international exchange participants each year, including:

- Bringing emerging and future leaders – many of them from countries key to U.S. national security interests – to the U.S. on programs like the Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) Program for high school students from Eurasia; the Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study (YES) Program between the U.S. and countries with significant Muslim populations; the Young Leaders Initiatives in Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Americas; and the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP);
- Expanding opportunities for young Americans, including students receiving Pell Grants, to study abroad through the Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship Program;
- Engaging and training young professionals through programs such as the Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange (CBYX); and
- Continuing to engage students and scholars through the renowned Fulbright Program.

Finally, State Department exchange programs are a cost-effective investment that provides significant and immediate economic impact in communities across the country, thereby making America more prosperous. More than 90% of the appropriation for educational and cultural exchange programs goes to American organizations, businesses, and individuals. Furthermore, exchange visitors support American businesses and local communities through their travel, hotel nights, and other expenses during their stay, and their presence at our colleges and universities support academic institutions throughout the country.

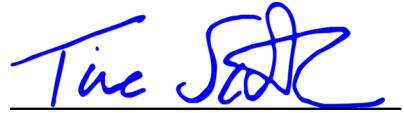
- International students studying at our colleges and universities during the 2023-24 academic year contributed \$43.8 billion to the U.S. economy (up more than \$3 billion compared to the prior academic year) and supported nearly 400,000 jobs across the country, according to NAFSA: Association of International Educators.
- 100 partner governments contribute over \$100 million annually to the Fulbright program.
- IVLP creates an 11-to-1 return on investment for American taxpayers through the generation of \$11 from American NGOs for every dollar spent by the federal government.

We respectfully request that you enable the continued success of these vital programs, without which the U.S. would unnecessarily undermine our nation's security, economic opportunities, and soft power, while ceding ground to other competitors and adversaries. As a result, we urge you to appropriate no less than \$741 million for Department of State educational and cultural exchange programs in Fiscal Year 2026.

Sincerely,



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



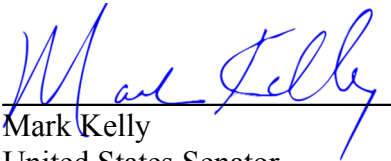
Tina Smith
United States Senator



Maria Cantwell
United States Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



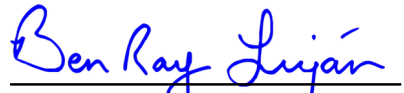
Mark Kelly
United States Senator



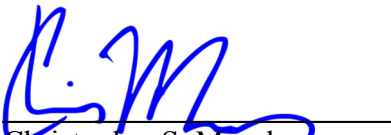
Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator



Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator



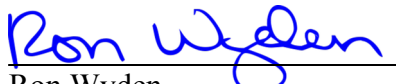
Bernard Sanders
United States Senator





Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator





Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator

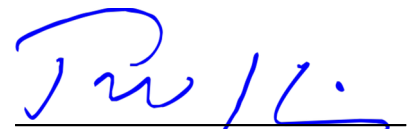

Ron Wyden
United States Senator

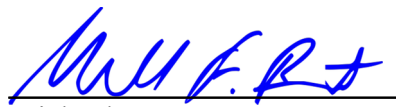

Jack Reed
United States Senator



Alex Padilla
United States Senator

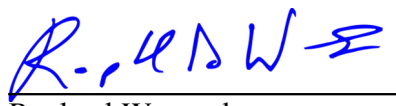

Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

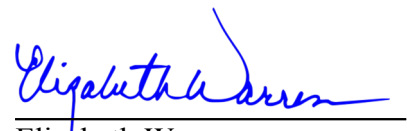

John Hickenlooper
United States Senator


Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator

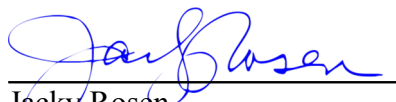

Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

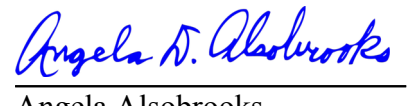

Raphael Warnock
United States Senator


Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator


Jon Ossoff
United States Senator

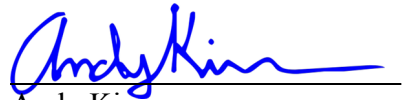

Adam B. Schiff
United States Senator


Jacky Rosen
United States Senator

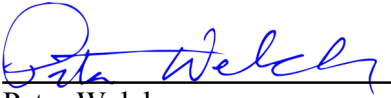

Angela Alsobrooks
United States Senator



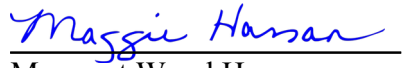
Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator



Andy Kim
United States Senator



Peter Welch
United States Senator



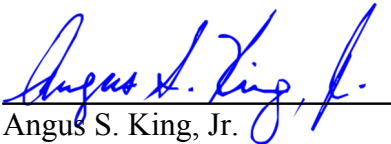
Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



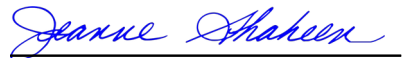
Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Mark R. Warner
United States Senator

State and Foreign Operations Group Letter Table
SFOPS_Booker_Group_250522-034903[LetterID 22258]

ID	Sub	Request Agency or Account	Request Project Name	Request (\$000)
184842	SFOPS Group	[Title I - Department of State and Related Agency]/[Department of State, Administration of Foreign Affairs]/[Educational and Cultural Exchange Programs] [Member Staff] - Mia Furtado Mia_furtado@booker.senate.gov 202-224-4702	Educational and Cultural Exchange Programs	\$741,000