



Funded by the U.S. Department of State, SUSI is designed for foreign undergraduate students between the ages of 18 and 25 to improve their understanding of the U.S. and to develop their leadership skills. Meridian, a nonpartisan, nonprofit diplomacy center that connects leaders through culture and collaboration to drive solutions for global challenges, entered into a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of State in FY 2019 to manage SUSI for Global Student Leaders. Meridian's SUSI program includes six institutes organized by themes:

*Civic Engagement* (Bard College, University of Washington)

*Entrepreneurship and Economic Development* (University of Massachusetts, Amherst)

*Religious Pluralism in the U.S.* (Temple University)

*Rule of Law and Public Service* (University of Nevada, Reno)

*Youth, Education and Closing the Skills Gap* (University of Washington)

## Study of the U.S. Institutes (SUSI) for Global Student Leaders



In 2020, Meridian contracted the evaluation team of Shaffer Evaluation Group and Cultural Crossings Consulting to conduct a formative evaluation of the Study of the U.S. Institutes (SUSI) for Global Student Leaders to assess program implementation and outcomes. The evaluators collected evidence on program implementation and outcomes by conducting interviews with alumni and Institute staff and faculty and administering surveys to alumni, host families, and student ambassadors/leaders. This study incorporated selected indicators from the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs' Monitoring Data for ECA (MODE) framework into the program logic model and evaluation framework.

### Findings

#### *Improved understanding of U.S. society & institutions*

**83% of alumni significantly increased their understanding of U.S. daily life and values** after participating in SUSI.

**Alumni expanded their U.S. networks**, with 80% of alumni reporting moderate to frequent contact with U.S. friends, especially host families, and 66% with academic colleagues after returning home.

#### *Increased self-confidence*

**SUSI significantly increased alumni's self-efficacy and perception of themselves as leaders.**

**Alumni reported learning leadership, professional, and personal skills** through the practical application of knowledge while participating in workshops, site visits, reflection, and volunteering. Host families supported learning personal skills, and the study tour supported learning professional skills.

**SUSI changed alumni's life goals**—78% of alumni respondents reported changing their educational goals after SUSI, while 68% reported changing professional goals.

#### *Better prepared to identify & address local or global challenges & opportunities at home*

**93% of alumni reported that SUSI helped increase their belief they could create a positive change in their home country.**

**Alumni developed a strong peer network**, with 95% reporting they had maintained frequent or moderate contact with other SUSI alumni from their home country and from other nations.

#### *Other findings*

**76% of alumni participated in virtual programming** offered by Meridian or institutes, with time constraints the primary reason for not participating.

**An unmet need was follow-up with alumni to help them psychologically adjust** once they were home.

**The COVID-19 pandemic affected alumni's Community Action Projects and educational/career plans.**



## Recommendations

### *Institute program design*

**Focus on program activities that contribute to participant outcomes**, especially those that allow for practical application of knowledge, such as volunteering, reflections, site visits, group projects, and stays with host families.

**Standardize the host family experience across institutes**, including use of effective practices such as pairing participants with families based on common interests and scheduling the stay near the beginning of the institute.

**Include and improve the professional skills component of institutes** by including curricula on practical professional skills (e.g., budgeting, nonprofit management, marketing) and introducing a post-institute professional development program.

**Provide re-integration workshops to alumni during the closing conference** to support re-entry into their home community.

**Provide institutes with program design guidance** to ensure program designs support experiential learning best practices and monitor fidelity to improve outcomes across institutes.

### *Considerations for a 2021 virtual summer program*

**Develop asynchronous programming** to address differences in time zones between the U.S. and participants' countries, allowing alumni to participate when it is convenient for them.

**Implement creative solutions to providing "theory to action" activities**, such as online volunteering or virtual site visits.

**Dedicate funds for participants' data fees**, since virtual program participation requires intensive data use.

### *Alumni virtual programming*

**Offer follow-on activities focused on the practical professional skills alumni report needing when they return home**, including grant writing, budgeting, nonprofit management, and social media strategies.

**Stagger times for synchronous programming** to maximize opportunities for participation by all SUSI alumni.

**Offer asynchronous programming, such as archived live-streamed programming or online training programs**, to provide alumni the opportunity to access programs at convenient times for them.

**Facilitate professional networking, connecting cohorts across institutes and years.**

### *Monitoring and evaluation activities*

**Create a set of common assessment tools for use across institutes** at specific times in the alumni lifecycle: before their institute begins, 3 months after their institute, and 15 months after their institute.

**Develop a common set of performance indicators and short-term outcomes based on the U.S. Department of State's MODE framework.**

**Develop and implement a structured communication mechanism between Meridian and Institutes** to improve coordination of activities, particularly alumni relations.