

THE LIFELONG BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ABROAD

Reflections from Fulbright Alumni Ambassadors

By: Malik Seals and Janika Berridge

Introduction

Funded by the U.S. government, the Fulbright U.S. Student Program provides grants for American citizens to pursue graduate study, conduct research, or teach English in over 160 countries. Critical to fulfilling Fulbright's mission to foster mutual understanding between the United States and other nations is participant engagement in the local community.

Community Engagement

- Initiated, supported, or joined
- Collaborative work toward a shared goal
- Participation in local customs or events

Alumni Engagements

- Mentoring graduate students in Nigeria
- Volunteering with NGOs supporting migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in Malta
- Hosting English clubs in Indonesia
- Engaging with a prison education program in South Africa
- Supporting the Special Olympics in France
- Organizing cultural events in Mexico
- Joining the chess community in Denmark
- Coordinating a Black History Month performance event in Montenegro
- Delivering lectures about water resources in the Czech Republic

Alumni Stories



"I volunteered with Special Olympics France. Aside from being something I was passionate about before my Fulbright, volunteering for this organization in another country allowed me to discuss the stigma around disability in a foreign country as compared to the United States, and share the benefits of the organization. Community engagement abroad helped me immerse into the culture and opened my eyes to a new perspective on the world. I was able to meet new people, share opinions, and continue giving my time to an organization I love."

Andrea Ori
Fulbright U.S. Student in Microbiology
France, 2019-2020

"I supported the English clubs for teachers and students at my school in addition to joining a local English-speaking community's Thursday night discussions. Through the local English community, I promoted a U.S. government-funded exchange program for which three of my local friends were selected. Welcoming them to the United States as they had welcomed me in Indonesia was a testament to the power of exchange."

Janika Berridge
Fulbright English Teaching Assistant
Indonesia, 2019-2020



"I joined my local chess club's tournament team in Copenhagen, helping the team achieve promotion to a higher division of the national league. It was fulfilling to fuel a passion of mine by connecting and competing with local Danes across the country!"

David Vizgan
Fulbright U.S. Student in Astronomy
Denmark, 2021-2022

I partnered with Skype-A-Scientist to video conference with students in classrooms across Germany. I also hosted workshops with high school students at Ansbach Middle High School to discuss career opportunities in STEM and medicine.

Malik Seals
Fulbright U.S. Student in Biological Sciences
Germany, 2021-2022



I volunteered with two local non-governmental organizations that provided support to refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants on the island. I taught weekly English lessons and traveled to the Open Centers where migrants resided to help with CV creation, support clothing/food drives, and be a part of a welcoming environment. I also participated in the Global 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence Campaign, providing activities for women and opportunities to connect with families. My favorite service event was organizing a climbing excursion with my students and the local Maltese climbing community.

Emma Alquist
Fulbright English Teaching Assistant
Malta, 2019-2020

Benefits

- Skills: cultural sensitivity, intercultural communication, language, leadership, advocacy
- Deeper understanding of the host community and promotion of diverse U.S. perspectives
- Sense of belonging and empowerment
- Increased visibility of issues impacting the host community or of the host community in general
- Lasting connections between people, institutions, and nations

Recommendations

- Observe and learn from the host community; assess local needs
- Initiate, support, or join a project or activity that maximizes skills and talents
 - Simplicity is okay!
- Establish measurable goals
- Seek feedback from community members
- Lead with openmindedness and flexibility

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