

SPORTSUNITED: BASKETBALL AMBASSADORS OF TODAY AND TOMORROW

APRIL 22 – MAY 1, 2016
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

GENERAL PROGRAM INFORMATION

- **What is “SportsUnited: Basketball Ambassadors of Today and Tomorrow”?**

“SportsUnited: Basketball Ambassadors of Today and Tomorrow” is a full scholarship exchange opportunity, funded by the SportsUnited Division of the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, and administered by the Russian American Foundation (RAF). As part of this bilateral exchange, from April 22 – May 1, 2016 RAF will send on full scholarship 16 American non-elite high-school basketball players (male and female) and 4 high-school basketball coaches (male and female) for a 10 day trip to Russia.

The Program is administered in collaboration with U.S. Embassy in Moscow, School 2.0 – a unique social, sports and education project established under the patronage of the best known Russian basketball player of our age – Andrei Kirilenko, and with the support of Russia’s national Student Basketball Association.

- **What are the components of the Program?**

The Program encompasses pre-departure activities and an overseas trip to Russia.

The pre-departure activities will be comprised of 3 one-day weekend events organized at New York City/Long Island locations and will be supplemented by virtual components. The goal of the pre-departure activities will be to familiarize the participants with each other, as well as to introduce them to Program’s expectations and assist in preparation for travel to Russia.

In Russia, the 10 days/10 nights of the Program will incorporate numerous basketball, cultural, and peer-to-peer experiences (sightseeing, friendly basketball scrimmages and practices, interactive workshops, attendance of sporting events, outings to local restaurants), which will use the common bond of basketball to expand participants’ understanding of Russia and its people. An additional focus will be made on professional activities (visits to companies and organizations, meetings with local leaders, etc.), which will introduce participants to diverse career and educational options available beyond this Program. While most of the trip is planned to take place in Moscow, a one-two day train trip to a nearby Suzdal and Vladimir Cities will be incorporated. A very unique opportunity of a visit to the U.S. Embassy in Moscow and meeting with various representatives is planned.

The students will also spend a weekend living with a local Russian host family. Coaches will not have a host family component.

Upon completion of the Program the participants will receive official Certificate and will be enrolled into the International Exchange Alumni Community of Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. This unique membership will allow alumni to enjoy enormous grant opportunities, professional development and network resources, access to 20,000 online magazines and newspapers, and many more.

- **Where will the Program take place in Russia?**

Most of the planned activities and programming will take place in Moscow. Also, as part of the Program, participants will visit nearby cities of Suzdal and Vladimir. No travel beyond the Program's official locations will be allowed.

- **Are there any post Program requirements?**

Participants are expected to share their knowledge / skills within their schools and communities. Upon their return to the United States, participants (both coaches and students) will complete a Program evaluation survey to help identify the impact of the Program. Participants will also be enrolled in various on-line U.S. Department of State alumni communities.

ELIGIBILITY

- **Do applicants need to have any background in Russian language to be considered for the Program?**

No knowledge of the Russian language is required. An American bilingual group leader will accompany the group on the overseas trip and will be available to participants 24/7 for overall guidance and assistance. Also, a professional interpreter will accompany the group for all Program-related activities.

- **Are you accepting applications from students outside New York State?**

The trip to Russia is planned within the New York State public schools official break. However, if a candidate from the Tri-State Area (NY, NJ, CT) is able to provide an official letter from his/her academic school allowing for absence during the Program period and is able to commit to attending all pre-departure events in NYC, s/he may be considered for the Program.

- **Are you accepting applications from coaches outside New York State?**

Coaches from the Tri-State Area (NY, NJ, CT) may be considered if they are able to commit to attending all of the pre-departure activities. No local travel expenses will be reimbursed.

- **What previous basketball experience do applicants need to be considered for the Program?**

The Program is designed for participants (students and coaches) who play/coach on a non-elite level. For student applicants, a minimum of 3 years of basketball team playing experience (non-elite level) is required. For coaches, present employment in a coaching capacity (non-elite level) is required. Additionally, applicants (both coaches and students) should be able to address in their applications how their experience with basketball helps to qualify them to be selected as finalist. Equally important as

achievements in the sphere of basketball, are candidates' contributions and successes "off-the court," Which should be demonstrated in each application.

- **I will turn 15 after April 22, 2015, can I still apply?**

To be considered, an applicant must be 15-17 years of age at the start of the Program on April 22, 2016. No exceptions will be allowed.

- **Can a non-U.S. citizen, including a permanent resident, apply for the Program?**

Only U.S. Citizens will be considered.

- **Is someone who holds dual U.S.-Russia citizenship eligible to participate in the Program?**

Applicants cannot have dual U.S. – Russia citizenship. If born in Russia, applicant must have official proof that s/he is no longer considered a citizen of Russia by the Russian government.

APPLICATION PROCEDURE

- **What is the selection process?**

Both fully completed applications (online and original) and all the required documents should be received by RAF's office in ONE package by **MONDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2015- 5PM**. The selection process will take place in two stages.

Stage one: The Selection Committee will review all complete and timely submissions and select semi-finalists, based on the following criteria: a) participant's desire to embrace leadership roles in their local and global communities; b) academic and "off the court" achievements; c) demonstrated maturity and responsibility in the applicant's decision making process, ability to function independently, and understanding of the responsibilities and inherent risks involved in overseas travel.

Stage two: The Selection Committee will conduct phone or in-person interviews with all semifinalists. Additional paperwork and a medical review process will be required.

- **How will I find out if I have been selected as a finalist?**

If selected as a semi-finalist, the applicant will be notified by the end of December, 2015 and will be required to fill in and submit some additional documents including Physician's Report and Medical Review Form and do an interview. The finalists will be announced by the end of January, 2016.

- **What should I do if I am having technical difficulties with the online application?**

Should you have any technical difficulties with submitting the online application or any other questions regarding the application / selection process, please contact directly Victoria Gumennaya (Program coordinator) at sportsunited@russianamericanfoundation.org or by phone 212-687-6118 ext. 203.

- **Could I change any information in my application after it has been submitted?**

No.

Once you have submitted the electronic application to sportsunited@russianamericanfoundation.org or original application to RAF's mailing address, no changes will be allowed. Please carefully read all the requirements and instructions, double-check your answers before sending the application.

- **Am I eligible to apply if my latest grades will not be posted until shortly after the deadline (for students)?**

Applications without transcripts will not be considered, so be sure to have your most recent transcript sent by **MONDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2015 – 5PM**, even if the current semester grades are not available.

LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION

Who should I ask to write my Teacher Recommendation (for students)?

- You may ask any academic instructor or guidance counselor who can attest to your qualifications for the Program. It is a good idea to ask an individual who knows you well. Give your recommender plenty of time to complete the recommendation.

- **Who should I ask to write my Letter of Recommendation (for coaches)?**

You may ask your immediate supervisor and / or colleague, who could attest your qualifications, experience and skills. Give your recommender plenty of time to complete the recommendation.

- **What should be included in my Teacher Recommendation (for students)?**

Teacher Recommendation is used to determine an applicant's academic motivation and promise as an exchange student. The recommender should: a) explain for how long and in what capacity does s/he know the applicant, b) discuss applicant's work ethic, notable achievements/qualities, special contributions and achievements. Ask recommender to be specific and detailed.

Teacher Recommendations should be submitted in signed enveloped sent in one package with the rest of the application materials. Make sure the letter includes First and Last name, contact information, address and job title of the recommender.

- **What should be included in my Letter of Recommendation (for coaches)?**

The recommender should: a) explain how long and in what capacity does s/he know the applicant? b) address applicant's qualities and skills, impact on the students and/or local community. Specific details and examples are encouraged. Make sure your letter includes First and Last name, contact information, address and job title of the recommender.

- **If I have been already mailed my application, can I change the name and contact information in the Letter of Recommendation?**

After you mailed the Letter of Recommendation together with your application, no changes to it could be made. Please carefully read all the requirements and instructions, double-check your answers before sending the application.

TIMELINE AND PREPARATION

- **When and how does a Medical Review take place?**

If selected as a semi-finalist you will be required to have a physician complete the Physician's Report and Medical form. More information on the medical review process will be made available at the time of the semi-finalist notification.

- **Will be there any kind of preparation before the program?**

Yes. Prior to the departure, all participants will be required to complete a short online course "Host's language through Basketball" prepared by the RAF. The course is designed to allow participants to learn foundation skills, - alphabet, greetings, introductions, and learn how to engage with peers, - counting, basketball terminology, movement, etc. The participants will also complete a small group interactive activity "Host's culture and country", which will introduce them to the host country's culture through case studies, articles, on-line modules, etc.

Additionally, the pre-departure orientations will be comprised of 3 one-day weekend events organized at New York City/Long Island locations. The goal of the pre-departure activities will be to familiarize the participants with each other, as well as to introduce them to Program's expectations and assist in preparation for travel to Russia. Some of the topics which will be addressed:

- Preparing for the Program organizationally; deadlines, rules, documentation, etc.
- Navigating the host country, cultural sensitivity & competency, and current events.
- Program's expectations pre, post and during.
- Engagement in the ECA community through its websites/social media (including International Exchange Alumni) and RAF's registrations of Participants.

- **Is Orientation mandatory?**

Yes, the pre-departure Orientation is mandatory for all the participants.

TRAVEL AND VISAS

- **How do I get a passport?**

All selected participants will need a valid U.S. passport. If you already have a passport, it must be valid at least six months after the intended date of return to the U.S. Note that passport processing time may be lengthy. For information on obtaining a passport for the first time or renewing, please visit <http://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en.html>

- **When do I need my passport?**

Copy of the passport should be received together with all application materials before the stated deadline. If you already have a passport, it must be valid at least six months after the intended date of return to the U.S. Note that passport processing time may be lengthy. For information on obtaining a passport for the first time or renewing, please visit <http://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en.html>. If

you don't have a valid passport by the time you submit your application, please contact the Program coordinator. All applications will be reviewed on individual basis.

- **Does scholarship cover costs associated with obtaining a valid U.S. passport and photos for visa?**

No. However, if a qualified applicant can demonstrate legitimate hardship in paying the costs associated with obtaining a valid U.S. passport, s/he should contact the Program coordinator. In some cases, additional financial support may be offered.

- **How do I get my visa? Would RAF provide any assistance to obtain a visa?**

Russian American Foundation will provide all the selected finalists with detailed instructions about the visa process and provide assistance with visa application. You will not need to apply for a visa until you are instructed to do so. All costs associated with processing a Russian visa will be covered by SportsUnited scholarship. While you will be required to provide passport photos and complete the on-line application, RAF will handle the actual process of obtaining the visa.

- **Do I need Health Insurance? Does scholarship cover costs associated with obtaining health insurance?**

All selected finalists will be enrolled in Accident and Sickness Program for Exchanges (ASPE) health benefits plan for the duration of the Program. For more information about the plan visit ASPE web site <https://www2.sevencorners.com/usdos/>.

- **Will I be able to travel independently while I am on the Program?**

All Participants will be required to attend all planned activities, and no travel beyond the Program's locations will be allowed. Some free time will be allowed to explore the cities where the Program will take place. Group leader/coaches will not be required to accompany participants during their free time and/or during their stays at host families.

PLACEMENT AND HOUSING ARRANGEMENTS

- **Where will I live during the Program?**

Participants will reside as a group in a dorm or moderate hotel accommodations (youth participants 2-4 to a room/coaches and staff 1-2 to a room). The students will also spend a weekend living with a local Russian host family. Coaches will not have a host family component. Transportation will be provided for all group activities.

- **Will an English speaking leader accompany the group during the Program?**

An American bilingual group leader will accompany the group on the overseas trip, will reside with the group in the dormitory/hotel accommodations, and will be available to participants 24/7 for overall guidance and assistance. American coaches will be with the group also, other than during host family

stays and some youth specific events. Group leader/coaches will not be required to accompany participants during their free time and/or during their stays at host families.

- **If I have relatives or friends in Russia, could I stay with them for the weekend?**

No. Participants will not be permitted to live with friends or relatives while in Russia.

- **Could my family or friends join me at the Program at their own expense?**

No. The Program is designed for selected students and coaches and doesn't allow the presence of any other individuals who has not been selected to participate in the Program.