Sample Community Resource Preparation Guide

The community resource guide can consist of three major components:

1. Information about your CIV (not included here)
2. Information about the IVLP and Exchanges in general
3. Information about what to expect when meeting a visitor or group of visitors

2. Information about the IVLP and Exchanges in general

The International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) is the U.S. Department of State’s premier professional exchange program. Through short-term visits to the United States, current and emerging foreign leaders in a variety of fields experience this country firsthand and cultivate lasting relationships with their American counterparts. Professional meetings reflect the participants’ professional interests and support the foreign policy goals of the United States.

Each year more than 5,000 International Visitors come to the U.S. on the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP). More than 200,000 International Visitors have engaged with Americans through the IVLP, including over 330 current or former Chiefs of State or Heads of Government.

Launched in 1940, the IVLP helps strengthen U.S. engagement with countries around the world and cultivate lasting relationships by connecting current and emerging foreign leaders with their American counterparts through short-term visits to the United States. The majority of IVLP exchanges include visits to four U.S. communities over three weeks, although projects vary based on themes, Embassy requests and other factors. Participants meet with professional counterparts, visit U.S. public and private sector organizations related to the project theme and participate in cultural and social activities.

3. Information about what to expect when meeting a visitor or group of visitors

Meetings with international visitors are meant to establish dialogue between American citizens and visitors. The idea is not necessarily to discuss how U.S. practices are best, but simply to share different experiences at face value. As a community resource, you will become a citizen diplomat “forging U.S. foreign relations one handshake at a time.”

Generally, you don’t need to prepare a PowerPoint presentation but materials about your organization/business/agency can be relevant. Just remember that the visitors may still travel to four other US locations and they cannot carry information on each organization they met with. Please bring business cards. Often one of the accompanying language officers will collect these and make photocopies at the end of the program including all business cards from people the visitors met throughout the program. Similarly, there may be a handout for you already prepared that includes all of the visitors’ business cards.
Some groups come with U.S. Department of State interpreters and some with English Language Officers. When an interpreter accompanies the group, allow just a little more time in the meeting. A typical meeting can take between one to one and a half hours. There is no need to speak louder, or slower or any differently when communicating through an interpreter. Make sure to keep your presentation about your organization brief, perhaps no more than 20-30 minutes and allow plenty of time for Q&A. Please introduce yourself (and staff, if available) and also ask about the visitors’ interests and backgrounds. Laying the groundwork right from the start enables easier communication.

A program coordinator from the CIV may or may not be attending the meeting, depending on availability. It is also the responsibility of the interpreter/ELO to insure that introductions are made if no CIV staff is available.

Avoid or at least minimize the use of idiomatic expressions. It is difficult for visitors to follow presentations in a second language, and unknown words or phrases can make conversations even harder to understand.

Do not invite members from the media to an appointment without having previously cleared this with the CIV. Our visitors may come from countries where travel to the United States is quite a sensitive matter. The U.S. Department of State respects visitors’ privacy and allows them to decide whether they agree to be photographed or interviewed by media, or not. Your CIV will have information about whether the visitors you will meet have consented to various types of media coverage, including online mention of them by name or in photos.

Other notes on protocol:

- Be aware of cultural norms that are different from your own. In some cultures, men and women do not touch, even to shake hands.
- Some visitors may observe religious practices that prohibit them from consuming any drink or food during certain times of the year or do not allow any consumption of alcohol or any pork products.
- Some visitors may carry weapon-like gear as part of their tradition or religion.
- Providing water, coffee or tea or other light refreshments is a welcome sign of hospitality, but not required.