

National Defense University Community Sponsorship Program Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Sponsor?

A Sponsor is a member of the local community who commits to develop and nurture a personal relationship with the International Fellow and their family, spending time and extending hospitality to their families

Who are the International Fellows?

The International Fellows (or “IFs” for short) are a cohort of about 100 senior-ranking (O-5 or higher) military officers who come from 60+ countries and live in the US for a year, from June to June.

Why are the IFs in the US?

IFs spend a year getting to know America, its people, institutions, and values, while studying at NDU for a Master’s Degree from the National War College, Eisenhower School for National Resource Strategy, or the College of International Security Affairs.

How are the IFs selected to attend NDU?

Every year, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff designates countries that the US wants to maintain or improve joint security cooperation efforts with. The country receives an invitation for a seat at NDU, and then selects a candidate with high promotion potential to attend.

What countries will be represented?

The countries represented change yearly— we can’t predict which countries CJCS will designate. Additionally, invited countries may not accept the seat, may not be able to nominate a suitable candidate in time, or the IF may choose not to participate in the Sponsorship Program.

Will the IFs be accompanied by their family?

IFs are authorized and encouraged to bring their dependents with them for their year in the US. However, every year we do have officers who do not want to disrupt their spouse’s work or children’s education in their home country, or otherwise single IFs who will be unaccompanied.

Will I need to pick the IF up at the airport?

No. ISMO and a corporate housing provider arrange transportation for the IF from the airport to their lodging. Other IFs who arrange their own housing typically receive assistance with transport from their embassy.

Will the IF live with me? Will I need to feed them?

No to both. Most IFs will live in USG funded housing, and will receive a daily living allowance for meals and incidentals and need no financial support from their Sponsor. IFs that do not receive USG housing and per diem are supported financially by their embassy/home government.

How do I know if I would make a good sponsor?

Good Sponsors have a sincere interest in the purpose of the program and in working with internationals. They take active interest in preparing for the IF before arrival and in making the IF feel at home while in the area.

What is the time commitment?

Sponsors should be readily available and proactive in communications during the first weeks when the IF arrives in the US. After the IF is settled, Sponsors are expected to meet with the IF, in person, at least once a month.

Will they speak English?

Yes, but to varying degrees. Some IFs speak English as a native language, but most speak English as a Second Language. They are required have a working proficiency of English in order to attend NDU, but spouses or children may speak little to no English (though it often improves throughout the year).

Do I need to be affiliated with the military?

No, you do not need to be in any way affiliated with the Department of Defense, you only need to be willing to fill the roll of a Sponsor. We have Sponsors from Department of State, Returned Peace Corps Volunteers, the Lions Club, the American Legion, People to People International, retirees, etc.

How do I form a friendship with the officer?

The first few weeks the IF is in-country is extremely important in establishing trust and friendship with the IF, and showing that you are there to support them. Be available and proactive— the IF initially won’t be comfortable asking a stranger for help. Be willing and able to drive conversations at first.

What are some things that Sponsors and officers do together?

Activities the Sponsor and IF do together are up to them and based on what their similar interests may be. Examples are: inviting each other for dinner, attending sporting events, visiting the Smithsonian, attending festivals like the Cherry Blossom Festival, celebrating holidays like Thanksgiving, etc.

What if I only want to sponsor a particular country?

Sponsors indicate preferences on the application form, and ISMO does our best to meet those preferences, but assignments are made on a first come first serve basis. Flexibility is important and appreciated, and frequently selecting regions is a better strategy than selecting countries.

What if I’m unable to commit to the entire year?

Sponsors play an important role for the IF, and prospective Sponsors should be able to commit to a year. If the situation changes (example, an unexpected PCS), then you should alert ISMO as soon as possible.