

Nacel Open Door Student Handbook

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Nacel Open Door Welcomes You!

Nacel Open Door wishes to extend a very warm welcome as you prepare for your exchange experience in the United States. We hope this handbook will help you to have an enjoyable, exciting exchange experience, as well as help you to better understand some of the things which may seem strange and difficult during your stay.

Our program exists because we know that young people can have exciting international learning opportunities when they have a chance to live abroad with a family and participate actively in school life. These are valuable growing experiences which are not available to a person who visits a country as a tourist. While you are learning about life in the United States, American families and schools will be interested in learning more about you and your country. We hope that all of you will come to understand and appreciate different ways of living, while still remaining proud of your own traditions. As Mahatma Gandhi once said:

*“Let all of the cultures in the world blow through my house,
but let none of them knock me down.”*

Family Life in the USA

Your American family is opening its home to you, not as a guest, but as a family member. Your family wants to learn about you and your country and is eager to share its particular style of life with you. Nacel Open Door host families volunteer to host, so you should expect to contribute to family life as well as to receive its many benefits. This means that you should offer to help with family chores, even though you may not do this in your own country. The idea is for you to experience what it is like to live as a member of a family in the United States. When you experience what is different, you have a chance to grow and expand your worldview.

While Nacel Open Door makes every effort to place you with a family that has interests similar to yours, there may be times when your interests and those of your host family differ. Consider this an opportunity for you and your host family members to learn something new.

What are U.S. families like?

Individual American families are as different as individual families are in your own country. It is normal for one Nacel Open Door family to permit its children to do certain things which another family prohibits. You are, of course, expected to follow the rules and customs of your particular host family during your stay in their home.

Generally speaking, Nacel Open Door families live in suburban or rural areas and are from middle-class backgrounds. If you come from a different social class than that of your American family, here is another opportunity to learn about a different lifestyle. Even if you are from the same social background, you will experience many differences in customs and habits.

Those of you who come from a city may have the challenge of learning about life in rural or suburban areas. If at some point you begin to feel bored, it probably means that you have not discovered many of the social activities available in your area, including community centers, school clubs, and religious groups. In this case, you should ask your family how you might become involved in such activities.

Many of you will find that American families are smaller than families in your own country. For example, it is becoming less common for families to have more than one or two children. Because many American mothers work, parents frequently choose not to have large families. While many American women continue to enjoy their roles at home, others have taken on careers in the workplace. In cases where both parents work outside the home, they tend to share the household chores, including cleaning and cooking.

If you are puzzled by the absence of relatives in or near the home, you should remember that family members in the United States often move away from each other because of job opportunities in other parts of the country. In these instances, family members maintain their connection by phone, e-mail, and visits during holiday periods and other special family events.

Host Siblings

If you have a host sibling, you should not expect that your interests will be identical. You will be able to learn from each other as a result of any difference in your interests. Any disagreements between you and your host siblings should be worked out in the same manner as you would work out disagreements with your natural brothers and sisters at home.

Remember that your host family is making adjustments in their lives to include you, in the same way that you must make adjustments in order to be part of their family. Your host siblings may experience difficulty in sharing the attention of their parents with someone new. You should, therefore, be sensitive to this and give them time to adjust to your presence in their home.

Please understand that you may also be placed in a home that does not have any host brothers or sisters. Every American family is different, and families come in all sizes. American families practice different religions, sometimes even within one family. American families have different values systems and rules. Each family is unique in its own way, and this is an important part of American culture.

Your American High School

Your experience in your American high school, as with your new family, will probably be very different. Just as it is difficult to define a typical American family, it is also difficult to define a typical American high school.

Many secondary schools, or “high schools”, as they are called in the United States, serve several hundred, or even several thousand students, who come from many backgrounds and levels of ability. Other schools may be quite small depending on the location and population in the area.

The courses offered at American high schools is different from school to school. Unlike many countries where education is controlled by a central Ministry of Education, public secondary education in the United States is controlled by states and local school districts. The local school districts receive general curriculum guidelines from the Department of Education in the particular state in which it is located. Because of this, the requirements in New York State may be very different from the requirements of Alabama or Utah.

Your Responsibility to Your High School

Officials at American high schools accept exchange students because they believe foreign students contribute to the academic and cultural life of the school community. You may be asked to give a presentation about your country. This will give you an opportunity to educate Americans about your culture and country.

You are expected to register in a **full course of study** including each of the following classes: English, Math, Science, Social Studies, and American history or government. The specific courses you select will depend on your school's registration policy and class availability. You are also expected to attend classes regularly, and to do all the required class work to the best of your ability, while respecting the rules and regulations of your particular school. You are also required by Nacel Open Door to maintain at least a "C" average in all of your classes. This means you should have a C level grade (or better) in all classes. If you have any problems with your classes or need assistance, you should speak with your guidance counselor, teachers, host family, or local representative. You will probably find that teachers in the United States are generally informal and are available to talk to students outside of class.

In many American high schools, classes often involve student presentations and general class discussions. A student's grade depends partly on how much he or she participates in class. Grades are usually based on a combination of factors including examinations, papers, quizzes, homework, class participation, and attendance.

There is often a wide choice of courses available beyond the basic requirements, and there are many "extracurricular" or non-academic activities. These include athletic events, dances, and club events of all types. If there is an international club at your school, you will certainly want to become a member.

Before you arrive, Nacel Open Door will send copies of your transcripts to your new American high school so that they can make an initial assessment about the appropriate grade level and types of classes for you to attend. **Nacel Open Door has no control over the grade level assignment for students. Each individual school will make that determination based on their policies regarding exchange students, and this varies from school to school.**

The U.S. High School Diploma

Many exchange students are eager to receive a U.S. high school diploma after completing a full year of study in an American high school. Whether or not this is possible depends upon these factors:

- The courses you have taken in your own country
- Your grade level in your own country
- The courses you take while in the United States
- The particular requirements and policies of your American school
- The guidelines of the particular school district regarding diplomas
- Your age

It is important to remember that the local school has the sole authority and responsibility to determine if you are eligible for a diploma. You should not demand to receive a diploma from your school! The decision of the school must be accepted by all Nacel Open Door students. Nacel Open Door cannot, and will not, interfere with the school's authority regarding graduation and diplomas.

Additionally, the Nacel Open Door program is not a college preparatory program. Therefore, it is not the responsibility of your school or host family to enable you to take college entrance exams (ACT, SAT, TOEFL) during your stay. **You should NOT expect to be able to take these exams as a part of your exchange program.**

United States Culture

Because there are so many styles of life and so many ethnic influences in the U.S., each of you will experience this country in different ways. Depending on where you are located, you are likely to experience some cultural influence of other countries, since many families maintain a connection to the cultures of their original immigrant relatives. Life also varies according to the part of the country in which you are placed. The southern part of the U.S., for example, has a different style and pace of life than the western or northeastern part of the U.S. You will also notice that there are many regional differences in the English language including different accents and different expressions.

Equality

Because of the importance of U.S. democratic tradition, “equality” is a very important concept in this country. This does not mean that everyone is equal in terms of social and economic status, but it does mean that the law helps to encourage equality of opportunity, regardless of ethnic background, race, religious practices, gender, or sexual preference.

While there are class differences, they are not generally formalized by special greetings based on social position or age, as is often the case in other countries. In spite of differences in age and social status, Americans frequently call each other by their first names, often when they hardly know each other. In addition, people in service professions (taxi drivers, waiters, store clerks, etc.) expect to be treated with respect, and often address people in an informal manner. Such informality is a reflection of the spirit of democratic ideas and the importance of equality in social relations.

Individualism

Those of you who come from group-oriented cultures may be surprised to find that Americans are often very competitive, and that they like to stand out as individuals in education, professional, and athletic activities. This does not mean that Americans do not cooperate. They often do things in groups or teams, but there is a common belief that people do best in fulfilling their individual potential through self-reliance. The expression of individual opinions is important, and there is great importance attached to private property. However, the importance of charities and volunteer work in the United States demonstrates a concern for those who may not be able to help themselves.

Religion

In the United States, the government guarantees religious freedom which permits people to worship as they choose, or not to worship at all. There is a great variety of religious beliefs and institutions, and the degree to which people practice their religion also varies from individual to individual. Most people who go to church belong to one of the many Christian churches which exist in the United States. In addition to the great variety of Christian churches – Protestant, Catholic, Presbyterian, Episcopal, Baptist, Lutheran, etc. – there are people who practice Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and other religions as well. Indeed, every major world religion is practiced to some extent in various parts of the United States.

If your host family is religious, you may be invited to attend church with them. If your religious beliefs are different from those of your host family, or if you do not have any religious beliefs, you may not wish to participate. However, we do recommend that you consider going to religious services, if only as an observer, so that you may learn about different religious practices and perspectives. In addition, social activities often involve the church in many American communities, especially for youth. You will have the opportunity to participate in social activities, which although organized by the church, may not have any specific religious purpose.

While you experience your host family's religious beliefs, we hope that you will also explain the various religious beliefs and practices of your country to your host family. This sharing of knowledge about each other's beliefs is an important part of the exchange experience. It is meant to increase mutual understanding and respect for different points of view.

Teenage Social Life

Like young people in many countries, teenagers in the United States enjoy parties, movies, dancing, and other social activities. Students often begin dating in their early teens, and sometimes will date only one person for a couple of months or even years. Unlike the customs in some countries, couples are not usually chaperoned, though parents do want to know where their children are going and who they will be with. There are usually specific times (called "curfews") for returning home. The curfew varies with each family, but generally they are extended to later hours as the son or daughter gets older.

Alcohol, Smoking, and Drugs

The purchase, possession, or consumption of alcohol is illegal in the United States if you are under the age of 21. Regardless of your age, however, **Nacel Open Door exchange students are NOT allowed to use alcohol or drugs of any kind.** The purchase of cigarettes is illegal in the United States if you are under the age of 18. Regardless of your age, however, **Nacel Open Door exchange students are NOT allowed to smoke.**

Drinking alcohol, smoking, or the use of drugs will not only affect your reputation as an exchange student, but it will also affect the reputation of Nacel Open Door. For this reason, the use of alcohol, tobacco, or drugs by any Nacel Open Door exchange student will result in the immediate return of that student to his or her home country.

Friendship

Often, you will find young Americans to be very warm and friendly, which leads visitors, to expect a deep relationship to form quickly. For many visitors, Americans show too much friendliness too soon, and then do not continue to build a deeper friendship. It is important, therefore, for you to remember that deep friendships generally take a long time to develop. Americans often simply associate being friendly, even upon first meeting a stranger, as a common courtesy.

Politeness

Every culture has its own standards of politeness, its own special greetings, and its own ways of expressing gratitude. For many of you from Spanish speaking countries, we may not say "thank you" often enough, compared to the frequent use of "mil gracias" in some of your countries. For some of you from Asia, we may appear to say "thank you" too often. Americans may not understand that in countries where there is mutual obligation, especially among family members, "thank you" is considered unnecessary. Instead, gratitude is shown constantly through actions. Please remember that "please" and "thank you" are important expressions in the United States.

Some of you may think that Americans are impolite because often they are so direct, saying what they think and feel, even if this may cause discomfort or embarrassment to someone. Expressing anger instead of hiding it is often encouraged as an open, honest way of dealing with people. On the whole, Americans certainly do not seek conflict, but many do believe that an honest and polite exchange of feelings is the best way to resolve issues. We therefore encourage you to tell your American family about any problems you may be experiencing in the family. If this is done in a direct, polite, and gentle way, it will probably be the best way to begin resolving the problem.

Time and Punctuality

The expression “to be on time” is a very important one to Americans. An appointment for 8:00 PM means exactly that for most people in the United States. If you are asked to meet a friend at a specific time, or if you are invited to a meeting or to a friend’s house at a particular time, you will be expected to be “on time” – that is to arrive at the time specified. If you are delayed, you will be expected to call to let your friend know this and to let them know when you will arrive. It would be considered impolite if you do not call. In addition, if you do arrive late, it is important to then apologize for being late.

Each host family has different rules about the curfew for their children. It is important to respect the curfew of your host families. If the curfew is 10:00 PM, it is important to be home no later than 10:00 PM. If, for some reason, you will be late, make sure that you call and inform your host family.

Non-Verbal Behavior

You will discover from your American friends and from other exchange students that people often communicate differently, according to their culture, in non-verbal ways. Gestures, touching, the use of eyes, laughter, and tears, all may have different meanings, depending on where you are from.

For example, for many South and Central Americans and people from southern Europe, people in the United States may appear to be cold because there is little touching and embracing to show affection. Students from the Far East, however, may find American friends, family members, and strangers to be too physical in their displays of affection or in the way strangers may greet each other.

Those of you who come from cultures in which the use of the left hand is strictly avoided when eating, touching, or greeting, should not be offended at the frequent use of the left hand in our culture. In the same manner, those of you who call someone by waving your fingers, palms down, should not be offended by the U.S. equivalent with the palm up, fingers waving towards the face. While this may be very offensive in some cultures, it is perfectly normal in the United States.

Some of you will, perhaps, be shocked to note that we often gesture with our index finger to make a point, while others will find it peculiar that we begin to count with the index finger instead of the thumb. Those of you who attach especially negative feelings to the feet will be surprised at where we put them and how we position them when sitting. Many of you from Latin America will initially feel strange when you see Americans making a circle by connecting the tip of the thumb and the tip of the index finger. While this may be vulgar in parts of Latin America, it is a gesture that means “excellent” or “well done” in the U.S.

Whatever your reaction to our non-verbal behavior, please remember that in most cases we do not mean to be insulting to a stranger. When you think that a gesture is insulting, ask what it means before you react. In observing our non-verbal behavior, we think you will make some amusing discoveries, learning what is right and polite in one culture is not necessarily so in another.

Culture Shock and Homesickness

No matter how much you have learned about life in the United States, you will probably go through a normal adjustment period. It is one thing to learn about differences and understand them – it is another thing to experience them. Sometimes behavior and attitude in a new culture seem so different that there is a “shock” or very uncomfortable surprise from all the newness.

The stages of “culture shock” are:

1. **“Honeymoon”**: Everything is great! You love the USA! You are having a great time.

2. **Shock:** There are so many differences in this country that you don't know how to deal with them. You didn't think things would be like this.
3. **Negotiation:** You learn to deal with the problems set before you and try to integrate them with your own beliefs.
4. **Acceptance:** You are able to live well in the environment with the differences you are experiencing.

The signs of "culture shock" can be homesickness, mild depression, withdrawal, anger, or even a tendency to sleep more than usual. In the beginning, this is often normal, but if these signs continue for more than a few weeks, it is time to seek help from your local representative, coordinator, Nacel Open Door student advisor, or the Nacel Open Door national office staff. Before contacting anyone, however, ask yourself if you have made a successful effort to get involved in family, school, youth, and community activities. If you have not, your host family can probably make some helpful suggestions about activities which will be of particular interest to you and which can help you to overcome your "culture shock".

Keeping active with your host family and participating in their activities is really helpful. Interacting with your host family will help to improve your English, and as your language skills improve, you will spend less energy focusing on communicating in another language, and your confidence will grow. Don't be afraid to ask people at school to spend time together. Sometimes students wait for an invitation from American students, but it is helpful to initiate a conversation or activity. It also helps to speak English as much as possible! Don't worry about making mistakes. No one expects your English to be perfect. You will want to communicate with friends and family at home, but the more you speak or write in your native language, the longer it takes to adapt, and it can actually worsen your homesickness. Becoming involved in activities, with your host family, at school, through your host family's church, or with new friends will help you to focus on your experience here, so that you won't have time to feel homesickness.

Student Problems and Counseling

At some point, you may need the assistance of the Nacel Open Door national office or a Nacel student advisor to help you with problems that you have not been able to resolve on your own, with your host family, or with your local representative or coordinator. These experienced and professional Nacel Open Door team members are dedicated to assisting students with questions, concerns, and issues that cannot be handled at the local level. They are responsible for any necessary communication to the partner organization in your home country. Please be aware that only a serious problem will be considered a reason to request a new host family. If, for example, you do not like your host family's rules, that is not sufficient reason for Nacel Open Door to find you another host family.

However, if a student has a problem that they feel they cannot discuss with their host family, local representative or coordinator, student advisors can help in these situation. We understand that it may be difficult for students to share these types of problems, but we must know about it to be able to help you. National office staff and student advisors will do everything possible to avoid an uncomfortable situation for the student. You may always contact the Nacel national office to discuss a problem.

The student advisors are also responsible for reinforcing the rules and guidelines of our academic exchange programs and will deal with disciplinary issues if students disobey program rules. Discipline may take several forms depending on the severity of the situation. Usually a verbal warning or written warning is issued, with the expectation that the problem behavior will improve. If it does not, the student will be placed on probation. While on probation, any further issues can result in repatriation. Repatriation is immediate if a student consumes alcohol, engages in sexual activity, drives a vehicle, or breaks any American law. Other situations are evaluated by a student advisor and appropriate disciplinary measures are put in place and

discussed with the student and host family as well as the partner in the student's home country, who will inform the student's natural parents.

You should remember that an exchange experience is not always easy, and that some of the most memorable experiences are those in which the exchange student and the host family have made an effort to understand each other and have worked out their problems. Experience has shown that these efforts lead to greater learning and to lifelong friendships and connections. Nevertheless, we encourage you to ask for help if you need it.

Nacel Open Door Contacts

Everyone involved with Nacel Open Door wants the exchange program to be a good experience for the student, the host family, and the school. The Nacel Open Door team is happy to discuss any questions or concerns, big or small. Once you are in America feel free to contact:

1. your Nacel Open Door Local Representative
2. your Nacel Open Door Coordinator
3. Nacel Open Door Student Advisor
4. Nacel Open Door's national office

When you arrive in the U.S., you will receive an identification card that has your host family address and phone number, as well as the name and phone number of your Local Representative and Coordinator and the Nacel national office contact information. The national office telephone number (1-800-622-3553) can be dialed for free from any phone in the U.S., and the phone will be answered 24 hours a day. If you do have a problem, please contact one of the Nacel Open Door staff members in the U.S. Your first call should be to someone at Nacel Open Door, so that we are aware of the problem. We cannot help if we do not know there is a problem!

The Nacel Open Door National Office:

Nacel Open Door
380 Jackson St., Ste. 200
St. Paul, MN 55101 Tel: 1-800-622-3553 Fax: 1-651-686-9601
E-mail: contact@nacelopendoor.org

Department of State: Academic and Government Programs Division (ECA/EC/AG)

Office of Exchange Coordination and Designation
Academic and Government Programs Division
ECA/EC/AG – SA-44, Room 820
U.S. Department of State
301 Fourth Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20547
Tel: 202-203-5029 Fax: 202-453-8640

Practical Matters

Insurance As a Nacel Open Door exchange student, you are covered by an illness and accident insurance policy. The policy does not include pre-existing conditions, sports physicals, required immunizations, or eye or dental care. You will receive an insurance ID card upon arrival into your host

family. Your host family will also have more information about the insurance in their Host Family Handbook.

Communicating with families and friends

Telephone: You should always ask permission before making long distance phone calls from your host family's telephone. If you are not sure which calls are long distance, ask your host family. It is important to remember to pay your host family for any long distance calls you make. When calling home, you should call "collect" so that charges can be paid by your natural parents. Another option would be to purchase an international calling card so that the calls are prepaid.

Email: Every host family has their own rules about computer usage. Please respect their rules regarding the use of their computer and internet. Do not download any software onto your host family's computer without permission. If you download a virus unknowingly and damage your host family's computer, you will be responsible for any required repairs.

Visits from natural family: Any visits from natural parents or other family members can often make it more difficult to adjust to life away from home. Nacel Open Door recommends that family visits be conducted towards the end of the student's program stay. Host families should not be expected to host the student's family during the program.

Money In general, we recommend that money for your personal expenses be kept in the form of ATM, debit, or credit cards. It is not wise to keep large amounts of cash with you.

Shopping Please remember that the main purpose of your exchange experience is not shopping. Naturally, you will want to purchase gifts and items in the United States which are not available in your own country. Your host family, as part of their normal routine, will certainly take you shopping, but you should not ask them to make special trips frequently to take you shopping.

Part-Time Jobs Exchange students should come to the United States with sufficient money to cover their personal expenses. In general, students are not allowed to work during the exchange experience, however government regulations permit you to do part-time, informal work. The types of jobs which might be available are language or other tutoring, grass cutting, snow removal, car washing, baby-sitting, etc.

Local Resources As we mentioned previously, the communities that you will be living in will vary, but our students are usually placed in host families that live in suburban or rural areas. Each of your communities will differ in the number and kind of resources that it offers. Most communities will have at least one high school along with an "elementary" and "middle" school. Most likely, each of the schools in the community will have a library that you can access. There is usually also a local community library. The library is an excellent resource for accessing not only books, magazines, and various media, but it is also a great way to find out about various resources that the local and surrounding communities have to offer. For example, the library may list upcoming community events, which you may want to experience. In addition, if there is public transportation in your community, the library will most likely list the schedule. The library may also list the local bank(s), health care centers, and recreation centers. Ask your host family for more detailed information on the specific resources in their community.

Procedures for Travel Approval

Although our program is not a travel program, we understand that many students do get the opportunity to travel while staying in the United States. However, since our program has an academic focus, we have guidelines in place regarding student travel, particularly overnight travel. It is the student's responsibility to provide the Travel Director with **all** necessary forms 2 – 4 weeks prior to overnight travel. Travel forms serve several purposes:

- Allowing us to secure necessary permission from host families, natural parents, and schools
- Keeping Nacel Open Door informed of the students' whereabouts in the event of an emergency
- Helping us to prevent issues with students' U.S. visas

All overnight travel outside of the host family community must be approved by the Nacel Open Door national office. Students, Natural Families, and Host Families must understand that all travel permission is approved or denied by the Nacel Open Door coordinator and national office Travel Director. Travel that involves "high-risk activities" is not allowed. High-risk activities include operating any motor vehicle, use of any type of weapon or firearm, and a range of activities such as skydiving, scuba diving, bungee jumping, etc. If you are not sure if an activity is considered high-risk, please contact the Nacel Open Door national office. If students fail to comply with the travel procedures or travel without prior approval, they will be subject to disciplinary actions, including repatriation. Thank you in advance for your cooperation!

Below you will find a description of the different types of travel situations and the appropriate travel forms required for each situation. Once you have determined which forms are required, please mail or fax the completed forms to the Nacel Open Door national office for approval. The address and fax number for our office can be found on each form. These forms can be downloaded from Nacel Open Door's web site.

Travel Forms

- Travel Proposal
- Host Parent Permission
- Independent Party Receiving Acceptance Form
- Natural Parent Release for Travel with the Host Family Outside the United States
- Natural Parent Release for Travel with School, Church, Club or any Other Independent Party during the Program
- Natural Parent Release for Travel with Natural Parents
- Natural Parent Release for Withdrawal from the Program

NOTE: Students are **not** permitted to take a trip alone without adult supervision. They may travel alone by plane, only if they arrange to be met by an approved adult, but they are not permitted to travel alone outside of the host family's community by bus or train.

Travel Scenarios

Overnight Travel with the Host Family

- **Any time** a student wants to travel overnight outside of their host community with their host parents, the student must submit:
 - Travel Proposal Form

- **Any time** the student will travel outside of the United States with the host family, the student must submit:
 - Travel Proposal Form
 - Natural Parent Release for Travel with the Host Family outside the United States
 - DS-2019 Form – the original “Certificate of Eligibility for J-1 Visa Status” must be sent via traceable mail or courier to the Nacel Open Door national office to be signed for re-entry into the United States.

NOTE: If a student is planning to travel outside of the United States, he/she must contact the national office and speak with the Travel Director. Students must abide by the visa restrictions of the country they plan to visit, and it is the student’s responsibility to investigate such visa requirements. Nacel Open Door does not bear any responsibility for information or procedures relative to the visa requirements of the destination country.

Overnight Travel with an Adult Other Than the Host Parent

- **Any time** a student wants to travel overnight within their host community, e.g. on a sleep-over, this is permitted without any documentation as long as the host parents know the parents at the home in which the student will stay. Sleepovers are permitted without documentation for up to two consecutive nights.
- If a student intends to stay at another home in their host community for more than two nights consecutively, the student must submit:
 - Travel Proposal Form
 - Host Parent Permission Form
 - Independent Party Receiving Acceptance Form for Independent Student Travel
 - Natural Parent Release for Travel with School, Church, Clubs, or any other Independent Party during the Program
- If a student will be staying in another home for 7 days or more, the Nacel national office must be notified, as this is no longer considered student travel, and other paperwork is required.
- **Any time** the host family does not know the parents at the home where the student will stay for a sleep-over, the student must submit:
 - Travel Proposal Form
 - Host Parent Permission Form
 - Independent Party Receiving Acceptance Form for Independent Student Travel
 - Natural Parent Release for Travel with School, Church, Clubs, or any other Independent Party during the Program
- **Any time** the student plans to travel overnight outside the host community with someone who is not the host parent (e.g. another family, band director, church youth group, etc.), the student must submit:
 - Travel Proposal Form
 - Host Parent Permission Form
 - Independent Party Receiving Acceptance Form for Independent Student Travel
 - Natural Parent Release for Travel with School, Church, Clubs, or any other Independent Party during the Program

- **Any time** the student plans to travel overnight outside of the United States with someone who is not the host parent (e.g. another host family, band director, church youth group, etc.), the student must submit:
 - Travel Proposal Form
 - Host Parent Permission Form
 - Independent Party Receiving Acceptance Form for Independent Student Travel
 - Natural Parent Release for Travel with School, Church, Clubs, or any other Independent Party during the Program
 - DS-2019 Form – the original “Certificate of Eligibility for J-1 Visa Status” must be sent via traceable mail or courier to the Nacel Open Door national office to be signed for re-entry into the United States.

NOTE: If a student is planning to travel outside of the United States, he/she must contact the national office and speak with the Travel Director regarding any visa forms that would need to be signed in order to re-enter the United States. Students must abide by the visa restrictions of the country they plan to visit, and it is the student’s responsibility to investigate such visa requirements. Nacel Open Door does not bear any responsibility for information or procedures relative to the visa requirements of the destination country.

Overnight Travel with the Natural Parents

NOTE: Visits with the natural parents are discouraged until the end of the student’s program. Students are not permitted to return to their home country during their stay unless there are exceptional circumstances (e.g. a death in the immediate family). Travel to their home country would need to be specifically approved by the Travel Director.

- **Any time** the student wants to travel overnight with their natural parents within the United States, the student must submit:
 - Travel Proposal Form
 - Host Parent Permission Form
 - Natural Parent Release for Travel with Natural Parents

- **Any time** the student wants to travel overnight with their natural parents outside of the United States, the student must submit:
 - Travel Proposal Form
 - Host Parent Permission Form
 - Natural Parent Release for Travel with Natural Parents
 - DS-2019 Form – the original “Certificate of Eligibility for J-1 Visa Status” must be sent via traceable mail or courier to the Nacel Open Door national office to be signed for re-entry into the United States. (This rule is waived for FLEX program participants, whose DS-2019 forms are issued directly by the U.S. Department of State.)

NOTE: If a student is planning to travel outside of the United States, he/she should please contact the national office and speak with the Travel Director. Students must abide by the visa restrictions of the country they plan to visit, and it is the student’s responsibility to investigate such visa requirements. Nacel Open Door does not bear any responsibility for information or procedures relative to the visa requirements of the destination country.

Nacel Open Door Basic Program Rules

There are certain Nacel Open Door rules that you are required to follow during your exchange experience. These very important rules are meant to protect you and to maintain the good reputation of Nacel Open Door and its students. While this is not a complete list, the following represents the most common situations that students encounter. Please also refer to the agreements section of your student application for other rules and provisions that are part of your program participation.

- ✓ Nacel Open Door students are not permitted to drive cars, trucks, tractors, motorcycles, motor scooters, snowmobiles, or any other motorized vehicles. This rule is intended to avoid complicated insurance and legal problems in the event of an accident. This no-driving rule applies to all students at all times, and Nacel Open Door will strictly enforce this rule, to the point of sending a student home, if it is broken. **Students are NOT allowed to perform “behind-the-wheel” practice hours required in most states for driver’s education.**
- ✓ Students are not allowed to handle, possess, or operate firearms or other equipment related to the act of hunting, e.g. bow and arrow, knife, crossbow, etc.
- ✓ The use of drugs or alcohol of any kind by Nacel Open Door exchange students is strictly forbidden. Use of drugs or alcohol will result in immediate program termination and repatriation.
- ✓ Smoking is forbidden for Nacel Open Door exchange students. Evidence of a student smoking is cause for repatriation.
- ✓ Sexual activity and behavior are not allowed while on the Nacel Open Door program. This includes any viewing or distribution of sexually explicit material or images.
- ✓ Overnight travel away from your host family is subject to the requirements listed in the previous section titled **Procedures for Travel Approval**.
- ✓ Students are not allowed to travel in cars with anyone under 25 years of age if traveling outside of the host family community. Outside of the host family community is defined as more than 30 miles from the host family home.
- ✓ Students are expected to spend major holidays with their host family.
- ✓ Nacel Open Door staff cannot and will not assist any student in making private travel arrangements. Any additional expenses incurred in changing your return travel plans are the sole responsibility of your natural family.
- ✓ Nacel Open Door students may not extend their stay in the United States beyond their program end date. Nacel Open Door cannot assist in obtaining visa extensions.
- ✓ Nacel Open Door students must obey all local, state, and federal laws while in the U.S. If a student is found to have broken a law, any resulting legal problems and expenses will be the sole responsibility of the student’s natural family.
- ✓ Students who receive below-average or failing grades and/or have behavioral problems at school are subject to possible repatriation.
- ✓ Students who are expelled from their high school for any reason will be repatriated.
- ✓ Computer and cell phone use should not be excessive, especially if it is preventing you from adapting to your school or spending time with your host family. It is important that you discuss rules and expectations with your host family regarding computers and cell phones.

Nacel Open Door rules are intended to protect students, host families, and schools. We expect all students to be good ambassadors of their countries and positive role models for student exchange. If you do not understand any of the rules listed on the previous page above, please ask for more information. Your local representative or coordinator, or the Nacel national office staff can answer any questions you might have.

Final Thoughts

The Nacel Open Door experience is something more than an opportunity to improve your English and make friends in the United States. It is also an opportunity for personal growth and development. In years to come, you will most likely look back on your exchange program as a critical experience in your life that prepared you for the future in unexpected ways.

One of the keys to a good exchange experience is being a good family member. If you make every effort to be part of your host family and to share in their activities and daily routines, your adjustment will be easier and your overall experience will be much more rewarding. By participating fully in your high school both academically and socially, you will benefit your education beyond simply learning new facts or completing a class. Throughout your exchange program, making an attempt to understand and respect differences and learning to adapt to a different way of life will change and shape you as a person.

We hope that this handbook has helped to prepare you for your exchange program. We also hope that you have a wonderful time in the United States making new friends and experiencing new things. And finally, we hope you will learn new things about yourself, about the United States and its people, and about the world in general!