

## Welcome Home Event/Re-entry Orientation: Resources

Each year hundreds of AFSers return from their experience abroad. In the same way AFS offers participants guidance prior to and during their program, we offer AFSers the skills and resources to navigate their transition home through Welcome Home Events. Welcome Home Events can also be called Re-entry Orientations. They can be short with less formal content, designed around a shared meal. They can be a formal orientation and longer. They can also be a mix to best suit your team.

You can also combine a Welcome Home Event with another team event, like a volunteer meeting or a hosted student orientation. If combined with another team event, it is important that the returnee aspects of the gathering are equally important to other components and that the returnees' needs are addressed, just as they would be in a stand-alone event. This can be accomplished by creating tracks or sessions specific to returnees.

### Get trained!

- AFS offers online [training modules](#) for Returnee Coordinators, which include more information about how to plan a Welcome Home Event

### Contact people about your event

- [Pull a list of returnees](#) in your area through Global Link or watch the [tutorial video](#)
- [Team Development Specialist](#) (TDS)
- [Area Team members](#)

### Prepare yourself!

- Welcome Home Event Checklist is a [printable checklist](#) for you to get started with event planning
- Take a look at the [Re-Entry Orientation Leader's Guide](#)

### After the event

- [Record your event](#) in Global Link

### Other useful information

- The ideal time to hold this event for students that return during winter months is between February 1 – April 31
- For students that return during the summer, holding the event between August 1 – October 31 is usually best
- Make sure to start planning at least a couple of months before the event to give yourself enough time to plan logistics and invite participants
- When planning, be sure to consider the students' return dates and what works best for the team (geography, capacity, anticipated attendees, volunteer network, budget and ideal duration)
- Join the [Returnee Coordinators Facebook](#) group for ideas and support

## **Welcome Home Event/Re-entry Orientation: Tips**

### **Getting returnees to attend the event**

- Many returnees are interested in volunteering, so try holding your Welcome Home Event right after another event put on by the team, like a team meeting or orientation.
- Center the event around a meal, like a lunch or dinner at a restaurant or a potluck.
- Make the event as engaging and interactive as possible; if the returnee is having fun and participating they are more likely to attend another event.
- Advertise your event on Facebook and the AFS-USA website to capture returnees who might not be as connected with your team but are in the area.

### **Getting returnees to respond to your invitation**

- If you are located in a large geographical area, try having returnees that live close to one another meet or chat. It is a great way to get the connection started!
- Send emails and lots of them! It can be a tedious task, but sending many reminder emails to returnees will encourage them to respond.
- Personalized emails! Even something small such as mentioning the country where the returnee lived can make a difference in getting the returnee to respond because the returnee knows the email was meant directly for him or her.
- Call the returnees! If you get the returnee on the phone, they'll be more likely to attend. If not, you can leave a personalized message.

### **Running an event for students that were only gone for a short amount of time in the summer**

- Downplay the "reverse culture shock" aspect of the orientation and spend more time sharing favorite moments and customs and asking the returnee how they will integrate what they learned abroad into their life at home.
- Have the student reflect on their time in a more conversational way by sharing stories and experiences.
- Use inclusive language. Don't always refer to their "year abroad" because not every returnee was on a year program.

### **Tips for running a successful event with small turnout**

- Take advantage of the small turnout! This is a great way for the group to get to know each other better and have deeper conversations about their abroad experience. You can tailor the event to the needs of a smaller group, such as making it discussion based.

### **Fun activities and how to start the conversation**

- Ask all returnees to bring one object from their study abroad experience to the event. Then have them introduce themselves by telling the group about the object.
- Have everyone introduce themselves (name, age, host country, etc.) in the language of their host country. Then have the other students guess where they went abroad.