

IDEAS AND APPROACHES TO PROGRAMMING FOR SPOUSES/PARTNERS

In planning programs to meet the needs of international spouses & families, some basic areas to consider include:

- 1) recruitment (finding the spouses and getting them interested);
- 2) development of leadership among spouses themselves; and
- 3) dealing with special challenges, such as child care, transportation, funding, finding places, to meet and variances in language fluency.

Our goal is to make this session as relevant to the needs of the participants as possible. We know that you bring many ideas and experiences, and invite you to share them during the roundtable discussion. The following list outlines some ideas regarding the 3 main areas mentioned above.

1) Recruitment of spouses (finding them and getting them interested in your programs);

The Challenge - If we offer programs for spouses, or wish to start one....

how do we find out who has brought a spouse or partner?

“ “ “ inform them about our programs?

“ “ “ get them to participate in our programs?

- Consult with the International Student Office to identify the students, post docs and visiting scholars accompanied by dependents.
- Create a “Sign Up Sheet for Spouses” to use at orientation & at the front desk of the Int’l Students Office to collect names and email addresses of spouses.
- Create an invitation to your program to be given to new students at orientation (to pass on to their spouses/partners). Hold a reception for new spouses.
- Work through the student nationality groups - ask their leaders to inform anyone with a spouse about your programs.
- Approach spouses through the student housing office on campus. Have a flier or letter explaining your programs and inviting them to a specific event.

2) Development of leadership among the spouses and partners

To create a thriving program for spouses with minimal staff or volunteer time, how can we involve the spouses themselves in taking leadership of programs? (When they first arrive, they have plenty of time and also bring a wide variety of special talents, expertise and cultural knowledge.)

- Invite a diverse group of spouses to a focus group meeting (or informal coffee) to talk about their experiences in moving to your campus/community, and what they need and what they could offer. Build this into a core group to organize the programs they choose.
- Design a “Spouse Registration Form” which asks not only contact information (name, country, email, phone, local address, # children), but interests, hobbies and career focus. Include spaces to offer to teach a class or volunteer to help organize a program. (You can list various options on the registration form, to give them some ideas, such as language, cooking, movie or book groups, hiking, sports or career-related skills.)

- Have “intake interviews” with spouses as they arrive, and mention ways that they can become involved in the campus or community that are relevant to their interests and previous work or study.
- Suggest that 2 or more spouses work together to organize a program or class.

3) Dealing with special programmatic challenges, such as child care, transportation, funding, meeting places, and variations in language fluency.

- Child care
 - ask a student service organization to assist with child care during your programs.
 - provide toys and snacks, and let the mothers and children come together (without child care providers)
 - assist the mothers in forming child care playgroups and cooperatives through which they exchange child care.
 - refer to other resources on campus who specialize in child care (Work/Life Office).
- Transportation
 - provide full information on local public transportation to new spouses.
 - create a map of the local area and invite each spouse to place a pin (with her name on it) where she lives. Spouses can then see who lives near them and share rides or create programs in their area.
 - arrange carpools to certain events, when possible.
 - recruit local volunteers to drive on tours or to help by picking up some of the spouses to bring them to regular programs.
- Funding
 - Funding will depend on the organization you represent and your goals and budget.
 - International Student & Scholar Offices can be approached for program support.
 - Encourage community volunteers and/or spouses to form a group and charge dues.
 - Simple programs can be funded by asking participants to pay a small fee, or to bring refreshments. (e.g. participants can pay for handouts in a language class, materials for an art class, or ingredients for a cooking class, etc.)
 - Approach local businesses to sponsor events with funds, food or in-kind services (fliers, etc.)
- Meeting places
 - Request assistance from the Student & Scholar Office in reserving university space.
 - Approach local community centers, libraries, restaurants, coffee shops, churches and other organizations to request use of their public rooms. Offer to acknowledge them in your program materials.
- Variations in English language fluency
 - Provide information about local classes in ESL in your area, or organize special classes in ESL for spouses to attend.
 - At large events, divide into smaller groups for discussions or conversation practice.
 - Recruit returning int'l spouses to help newcomers in their own language.
 - Form a “Welcome Committee” of returning international spouses to plan events for newcomers, such as a Welcome Coffee/Reception. Publicize the languages that hosts will speak at the event (so newcomers with little English will feel comfortable attending).

- Plan programs that don't require much English, such as hiking, art, cooking & crafts classes where participants can learn by watching or doing.

The best source of ideas for programs for spouses/partners/families on your campus is the spouses themselves. They bring a wealth of skills and talents and experience. By involving them in identifying their needs and working together to create programs that meet those needs, you can create a sense of community and empower them to actively shape fulfilling lives in their new surroundings.

For a list of some examples of programs for international spouses, partners and families offered by universities and community organizations around the United States, please see the Resources section of the www.spouseprograms.org web site. We invite additions to the list.