

Baltics Youth Leadership Program Summer 2018

Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia Youth Entrepreneurs

PAS Vilnius, Riga, and Tallinn recruit participants for an On-Demand Youth Leadership Program (YLP) for 21 youth **ages 15-17 (7 from each country)**, and **three mentors (one from each country)**, to develop young leaders who understand entrepreneurship and how to develop the economic potential in their home communities including amongst Russian-speaking youth in the region. This program can be a capstone to programming throughout the year celebrating all three countries centennial anniversaries and how far they have come from the fall of the Soviet Union.

The theme of the YLP would be *Empowering Baltic Youth Entrepreneurs*. Students will learn about leadership, civic engagement, and volunteering, along with the building blocks of entrepreneurship. These skills, coupled with improved English, will help propel them forward and give them opportunities which will have a ripple effect at home. Student participants and their families also will expand engagement with the U.S. Embassy and then increase regional participation in English language programs, participation in other Embassy and ECA programs, and internships and education in the USA.

Our Embassies are all pursuing a multifaceted approach to economic development, including creating opportunities for business owners and community leaders of all ethnic and linguistic backgrounds to learn from American experts and success stories. Such efforts include Embassy Riga's Start Strong entrepreneurship program, Embassy Vilnius' 2017 speaker program on economic revitalization of small cities, and many others.

This program will also be an important tool for integration by incorporating a mix of youth from Latvian/Lithuanian/**Estonian communities and youth from Russian-speaking communities** and encouraging collaboration in a fresh environment in an area of common interest – entrepreneurship.

All our posts have seen local businesses thrive when they understand innovation, entrepreneurship and how to use tech tools. We want to amplify those stories and develop a strong cohort of business leaders who can bridge borders – national, EU, digital and linguistic.

While on the **three week program**, participants will have meetings with young business leaders, entrepreneurial incubators, Junior Achievement, 4H programs, and educational organizations that build creativity and business skills for American youth and include opportunities for public high school students and American youth to participate. At the end of the program, each participant, or group of participants, will come back to the region with a project plan for implementation in their home communities with support from Embassy entrepreneur and alumni networks.

Outcomes

- 1) A core group of young Baltic leaders and future entrepreneurs will grow and contribute to the economic development and revitalization of their communities.
- 2) That core group will be well networked with one another and supported with appropriate tools to continue supporting one another and collaborating to address shared challenges including across traditional linguistic lines.
- 3) The participants in the will become stronger advocates for developing U.S. business ties and help develop community resiliency to anti-Western propaganda across sectors.

Program Administration:

PAS Riga, Vilnius, and Tallinn will recruit seven students ages 15-17 (and 1-2 alternates) and one educator/mentor from each country for participation on the YLP program, summer 2018. All participants will speak English at a level adequate for communication in the United States without an interpreter. In the U.S., students will live with host families to explore American culture and society more deeply which will provide them the background upon which the American entrepreneurial spirit is built.

Recruitment/applications and nominations will include a brief essay and an interview process, as in most of our educational exchange programs. We will make every effort to recruit gender - and diversity - balanced groups and will encourage applicants form a variety of locations in the region.

Upon return, alumni will become part of the Embassies' alumni networks and help to foster ties between the cross-border alumni communities of the Baltics. YLP Alumni also will be eligible to receive small grants for community development projects, and will be invited to participate in a variety of alumni events. PAS sections will feature the experience of the YLP group while on the exchange program widely on social media.

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