



Collaborative Partnerships

Building Effective Sponsored Student Programs

By Craig E. Hastings

About the Author

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Table of Contents

| | |
|---|---|
| Introduction | 1 |
| Basic Definitions | 1 |
| History | 2 |
| Sponsored Students | 2 |
| Sponsors..... | 3 |
| Program Managing Organizations | 4 |
| Educational and Training Institutions | 5 |
| Issues of Potential Conflict..... | 6 |
| Conclusion | 7 |
| Appendix: Partial List of Currently Active Program Managing Organizations | 8 |

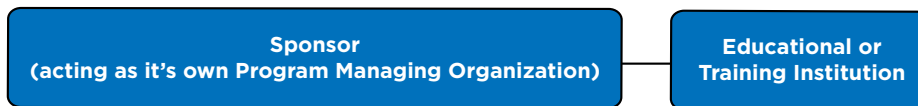
Collaborative Partnerships: Building Effective Sponsored Student Programs

INTRODUCTION

The administration of sponsored student programs is a complex endeavor that usually involves, in addition to the sponsored student, some combination of three key partners: the sponsor, the program managing organization, and the educational or training institution. As illustrated in the graphic below, in the traditional model the sponsored program administration is carried out by all three partners.



However, in some cases, as illustrated below, a sponsor acts as its own program managing organization, carrying out both of those roles and responsibilities. An example of this second model may be where a foreign government sponsor also manages the program in the host country through its Embassy and/or consulates, rather than contracting with a program managing organization.



A third model, depicted below, also exists whereby the educational or training institution fulfills the function of the program managing organization by contracting directly with a sponsor, both to manage all aspects of the sponsored student program in the host country, as well as provide the education or training.



Given the complexities in administering a sponsored student program, it is helpful to understand the definition of each partner in the equation and to understand each partner's roles and responsibilities. Successful sponsored student administration requires clear and frequent communication and good working relationships between each of the partners. As a result of much good collaboration, communication, and sharing of information and resources between sponsors, program managing organizations, and educational or training institutions over the past four decades, many sponsored students programs today run smoothly and effectively to the benefit of all partners involved, not the least of which is the sponsored student.

BASIC DEFINITIONS

Sponsored student. A sponsored student is an individual selected by a sponsor to receive funding to complete a program at an educational or training institution usually outside the individual's home country. That training may be an academic degree, an existing or customized short-term program, or a cultural, professional, or scholarly experience in another country.

Sponsor. A sponsor is an organization, association, company, institution, U.S. or foreign government

agency that provides primary funding for foreign students to attend an educational or training institution in another country. The sponsor may also manage one or more aspects of the sponsored student program both in the home country as well as in the host country.

Program managing organization. A program managing organization (sometimes also called a program or programming agency, placement agency, or even sponsoring organization) operates under contract with a sponsor to perform specific

administrative tasks and student services related to the education or training program.

Educational or training institutions. A college, university, government agency, or any organization or company that provides information or training to an individual sponsored student or groups of sponsored students.

HISTORY

Sponsored student programs have existed for more than 60 years, as early as the U.S. government's flagship Fulbright Program, which began in 1946, and former U.S. President Harry S. Truman's Point Four Program in the 1950s. The latter was aimed at providing technical assistance to developing nations, including the provision to educate students primarily in agricultural disciplines. Various foreign governments have also sponsored large numbers of students to study in the United States and other countries for many decades. From the early 1950s through the 1980s, the U.S. government was a primary sponsor of international students with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), funding thousands of sponsored students from developing countries through technical assistance projects and special targeted programs such as the Central American and Andean Peace Scholarship programs. In the 1980s, the U.S. Department of Agriculture also funded large numbers of sponsored students. Many U.S. universities, especially large land-grant universities, served as host institutions to these groups of sponsored students. During the 1990s, after the fall of the Soviet Union, the U.S. government funded programs such as the Edmund S. Muskie Graduate Fellowship Program, targeting students from the emerging nations of Eastern and Central Europe, Central Asia, and Russia. Foreign governments of countries such as Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Taiwan, Thailand, and Venezuela also sent large numbers of sponsored students to U.S. universities in the 1970s, '80s, and '90s. In essence, the history of sponsored students may be viewed as a study in geopolitics. By the late 1980s, it was estimated that 20 percent of all international students studying in the United States were sponsored students; by the early 1990s, that percentage had increased to 30 percent.

In order to provide services to the large groups of sponsored students coming to campus, many U.S. universities created positions to serve as advisers to these students and to act as liaison to the sponsor. Some institutions even created a dedicated sponsored student office. On most campuses, however, the responsibility for working with sponsored students remained part of the overall responsibilities of the international office.

Today, large numbers of sponsored students come from the Middle Eastern and Gulf State countries of Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, and more recently Iraq, Kazakhstan, Libya, Turkey, and other countries.

In other regions of the world, the Brazilian government, for example, announced in 2011 an ambitious effort to send 101,000 students abroad in the four-year period from 2012-2015.

Despite the large number of sponsored students from several countries, the overall percentage of sponsored international students studying in the United States today is less than 15 percent. This is not completely surprising, as many other countries such as the United Kingdom, France, China, Australia, Germany, and Canada are now also active recruiters and recipients of sponsored students.

In an effort to attract larger numbers of sponsored students to campus, some host institutions have included increasing the number of sponsored students as a goal in their international enrollment management plan, and have created positions responsible for sponsored student recruitment. While it is estimated that around 30 percent of institutions have a dedicated staff member to work with sponsored students, perhaps just over 10 percent have dedicated offices for this purpose.

SPONSORED STUDENTS

The duration of a sponsored student's education or training can be anywhere from a few days, weeks, or months, to a multi-year academic degree program.

If the education or training is to be provided in a language that is not the student's native language, foreign language training might be part of or the sole purpose of the program.

Sponsored student roles and responsibilities:

- a) Understand and agree to abide by the regulations and requirements of the sponsored student program.
- b) Understand the terms of the grant or scholarship award, including which items are covered by the sponsor and the host institution if applicable, and which items may need to be covered by the student.
- c) Assume responsibility for enrolling in courses that are appropriate for the program being funded.
- d) Maintain periodic contact with sponsor and/or program managing organization.
- e) Seek prior approval from the sponsor, program managing organization, and/or host institution before modifying program and/or educational or training objectives.
- f) Provide all required information (e.g. address and contact information, grades or academic progress reports, forms required by the sponsor or program managing organization) as agreed under terms of sponsorship.
- g) Understand and agree to meet language proficiency and other test requirements of the university for admission.
- h) Be willing to make necessary cultural adaptations to effectively complete the academic or training program.
- i) Comply with the laws of the host country, including requirement to pay any tax obligations incurred by acceptance of direct or indirect payments.
- j) Comply with requirements to maintain legal immigration status, both personally and for all dependents who accompany the student for all or part of the program.
- k) Return to home country at completion of program to share acquired knowledge and skills with home country community, thereby contributing to the further development of the country/society.

SPONSORS

Sponsors represent a broad array of institutions and organizations both in the United States and abroad. In addition to the U.S. government, one of the most

common sponsors is a foreign government that provides funding for its citizens to receive training and education abroad. Often the country will maintain an office or division within its Embassy and/or consulate in the host nation to administer certain aspects of the sponsored student program. That office may be part of the educational or cultural division of the Embassy, or a technical assistance or science and technology unit.

Some examples of sponsors include:

1. **The U.S. government**, which sponsors programs such as the Fulbright Program and the Global Undergraduate Exchange Program (Global UGRAD) through the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the Department of State, or training programs sponsored by the U.S. Agency for International Development.
2. **Foreign governments**, whether through Ministries of Education, Planning, or Science, Technology and Innovation.
3. **Private foundations** such as the Ford Foundation, which sponsored the International Fellowships Program, or the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, or Rotary International.
4. **International organizations** such as the Food and Agriculture Organization, UNESCO, the World Health Organization, International Development banks, the World Bank or the Organization of American States.
5. **Public and private companies**, both U.S. and foreign. For example, Aramco Services Company, or SABIC.
6. **Foreign universities** engaged in faculty development.

Sponsor roles and responsibilities:

- a) Provide adequate primary funding for the sponsored student to cover monthly living costs and the tuition cost (full or partial) of attending the educational or training institution. They may also provide airfare once a year.
- b) Define the parameters of the educational or training program, including the goals, objectives, type and degree level of the training, as well as any time and/or funding limits; often this is done in consultation or collaboration with the program

Collaborative Partnerships: Building Effective Sponsored Student Programs

managing organization and/or the educational or training institution.

- c) Establish guidelines, criteria, and procedures for the selection of the students to be sponsored and provide this information online or in other means to potential applicants, selected students, program managing organizations, and educational or training institutions as appropriate.
- d) Define the student's responsibilities both during and upon completion of the education or training.
- e) Provide clear documentation for students and host institutions regarding financial benefits of the grant or scholarship (both for students and their dependents if applicable), program policies, requirements and responsibilities of the student for maintaining the funding, and remaining in good standing with the program.
- f) Provide host institution information to students, either directly or through a contracted program managing organization.
- g) Administer the program directly, or contract with a program managing organization to administer the program.
- h) Ensure that students have access to appropriate orientation materials, either online or in person, both prior to departure from the home country and upon arrival in the host country.
- i) Provide adequate accident and health insurance, and/or cover the cost of the host institution policy.
- j) Arrange for timely transfer of funds to the program managing organization, host institution, and/or directly to the students.
- k) Prepare students for return home by providing support and information for cultural and professional re-entry.

PROGRAM MANAGING ORGANIZATIONS

In most cases, the program managing organization administers the sponsored student program on behalf of the sponsor.

It is important to note that program managing organizations typically administer sponsored student programs on behalf of several sponsors. Likewise, a sponsor may contract with several program

managing organizations to administer the same program. For example, in the case of the Fulbright Program, the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) works with three program managing organizations (or cooperating agencies), which are: AMIDEAST, IIE (including its Council for International Exchange of Scholars, or CIES, division), and LASPAU. Similarly, ECA's Global UGRAD program is administered by American Councils, IREX, and World Learning. While the general policies of each program are standard, there may be operational differences in the way the program is managed by each organization.

Program managing organization roles and responsibilities:

Depending on the specific contract with the sponsor, program managing organizations may provide some or all of the responsibilities in the following list.

- a) Perform a needs assessment and/or assist in the design of a sponsored student program.
- b) Promote the program on behalf of the sponsor and recruit suitable candidates.
- c) Evaluate the candidates, possibly including in-person interviews, and select and/or recommend students for selection.
- d) Provide or assist with pre-departure, arrival, and re-entry orientations, online or in person.
- e) Arrange for intensive foreign language training and/or cultural orientation as agreed upon by the sponsor.
- f) Arrange placement of the student in an appropriate academic or specialized training program, seeking tuition assistance when necessary.
- g) Compile and provide complete information to host institutions on a student's educational background and language proficiency, including certified copies of documents, such as transcripts, diplomas, and language proficiency and other standardized test scores.
- h) Provide complete information about financial terms of the grant or scholarship to the student and the host institution.
- i) Provide complete information on the academic placement, including: any conditions of the admission that must be met; applicable costs and terms of any tuition award from the host institution; requirements for renewing such an award

Collaborative Partnerships: Building Effective Sponsored Student Programs

if necessary; information on the department and international student office; and the dates of orientation and registration.

- j) Issue a billing authorization or other form to the host institution to provide details on which charges should be billed to the program managing organization and/or the sponsor directly, and which are the responsibility of the student.
- k) Issue visa eligibility documents (DS-2019), and/or request such documents from the host institution on behalf of the student (and student's dependent(s) if applicable), providing detail of the terms of the grant or scholarship, and any possible time limitations or other sponsor requirements to the institution.
- l) For students for whom the program managing organization issued a certificate of eligibility for a J-1 visa, for example, ensure the student understands how to maintain legal immigration status for the duration of the program for which it was issued.
- m) Administer all or some of the financial aspects of the program such as tuition and fee payments to the host institution, living allowance payments to the student, insurance, travel, books or educational materials, and any other allowances.
- n) During the course of the educational or training program, maintain direct contact with the sponsor, the student, and the educational or training institution.
- o) Monitor the student's academic progress, personal well-being, and immigration status.
- p) Request student academic progress reports on a regular basis from the student and/or from the educational or training institution and provide these reports to the sponsor. Follow up with students and/or host institution as necessary to discuss any problematic academic issues.
- q) Maintain these academic progress reports and financial records for the sponsor.
- r) Designate one or more contact person(s) for liaison with the educational or training institution.
- s) Serve as a contact for all communications between student, host institution, and sponsor.
- t) Maintain contact with host institution personnel and students, including site visits when possible, and if part of the contract with the sponsor.
- u) Inform students of host country tax laws and of the student's responsibility to file tax forms and pay appropriate taxes if necessary. When the tax liability is covered by the sponsor's financial commitment, make timely tax payments on behalf of the student, and/or provide the student with funds for tax payment.

EDUCATIONAL AND TRAINING INSTITUTIONS

Several types of institutions provide education and training to sponsored students. While colleges and universities typically offer traditional academic degree programs, they may also provide short-term training in the same way that a government agency (e.g. the U.S. Census Bureau of the Department of Commerce) or private company (such as Citigroup) offers customized courses or workshops to international participants. Language training centers, whether stand-alone or part of a college or university, are also frequent trainers of sponsored students.

Educational and training institution roles and responsibilities:

- a) Provide program managing organization and/or sponsor with procedures and requirements for admissions process, as well as information on academic departments and programs of study offered.
- b) Demonstrate capacity to provide the appropriate program for the student as requested by the sponsor and/or program managing organization, and provide information about tuition assistance or other cost share where available.
- c) Admit a student according to institutional acceptance criteria.
- d) Designate an institutional contact (such as a sponsored student adviser, coordinator, director, or foreign student adviser), to serve as liaison with sponsor and/or program managing organization.
- e) If the institutional contact is not the sole point of contact with the sponsor/program managing organization, they shall serve as liaison or source of information on the objectives and procedures of the sponsored student program to other offices on campus (e.g. bursar's office, academic department, housing office, etc.).
- f) Provide the sponsor and/or program managing organization with third-party billing instructions

or procedures along with accurate estimates of all program costs: tuition and fees, living allowances, insurance, special fees and research costs.

- g) Facilitate the student's (and if applicable, the dependents') adjustment to the institution and the community through orientation programs and other special services.
- h) Maintain institutional support services to advise students on matters such as housing, immigration regulations, insurance, and academic and/or personal counseling, referring the student to the program managing organization or sponsor as appropriate.
- i) Accept the sponsor's training objectives and adhere to program regulations when advising and monitoring students.
- j) Provide programs and resources, when available on campus, to assist the student in improving host country language proficiency.
- k) Provide student progress reports as required by the sponsor and/or program managing organization.
- l) Consult with the program managing organization or sponsor before modifying content or duration of student's program.

ISSUES OF POTENTIAL CONFLICT

Questions and issues can arise that are a potential source of conflict between the individual parties involved in the administration of sponsored student programs. The best way to avoid potential conflicts is to be aware of the areas of concern at the onset of the program. Some areas of potential conflict include:

- a) **Sponsored student fee.** Educational and training institutions that host sponsored students sometimes provide services above and beyond those they provide to individual self-funded international students. In order to cover the cost of providing these extra services (such as airport pickup, additional reporting, specialized or third-party billing, or specialized orientation services for the sponsored student and dependents), some institutions charge a sponsored student fee to the sponsor. Although this may have been a somewhat contentious issue in the past, today it is a fairly accepted practice. In order to avoid potential conflict around this fee, the host insti-

tution can clearly state up front its policy of charging this fee to sponsors and explain what services this fee is meant to cover.

- b) **Conditional admission.** Host institutions may choose to offer conditional admission to sponsored students, which can be very helpful to sponsors and program managing organizations. These offers of conditional admission are generally extended when the student is academically admissible to the program, but may have not yet met a required language or standardized test score minimum, or may need to take a prerequisite course or courses. In order to avoid any possible conflict or misunderstanding, it is very helpful to all parties involved for the host institution to clearly state how the condition(s) on admission can be met by the student, and any possible time limitation by which the condition must be met before the offer of admission is no longer valid.
- c) **Host institution language proficiency.** The question of language proficiency can be complicated, especially when the host institution has an in-house language training program. Such institutions may have categories of admission that differentiate between: (1) the applicant whose language score is too low for consideration for anything except the language training program, (2) the applicant whose language proficiency is close to the required level and who may be able to take some academic coursework in conjunction with language training, and (3) the applicant who has met all requirements for full admission. In the second instance, it is important for sponsors and program managing organizations to be aware how much language training will be required and how much academic credit (if any) will be awarded by the host institution. If the sponsor will only pay for academic programs, and not for language training, the sponsor and/or program managing organization must articulate this policy clearly and up front both to the student and the host institution. If the sponsor does not pay for language training, but will allow the student to pay for the training him or herself prior to being funded for an academic program, the question of who pays for what should be resolved before the student arrives at the host institution.
- d) **Transfer credit for previous academic work completed.** Students may have academic credits earned at an institution in the home country,

a third country, or at another institution in the country of study. In such cases, the admitting host institution typically prepares an evaluation of applicable transfer credits upon a student's acceptance into the program or after the student has enrolled (depending on institutional practices, and if the degree program accepts credit earned at other institutions). The sponsor and the student must be realistic in their expectation about transfer credits, especially where previous academic work does not correspond to the area of study for the requested program, or if institutional or departmental policy does not allow for the awarding of transfer credit for previous academic work. Students will facilitate transfer credit evaluation if they bring documentation of course content when they arrive at the host institution.

e) **Limitations on duration of funding from sponsor.**

Sponsors often set limits of time and/or funding that correspond with when the program they are sponsoring must be completed by the student. (For example, 18, 21, or 24 months for a master's degree.) The student and the academic adviser share the responsibility to meet this time constraint, though it is not always possible. If a student needs more time to complete the program, he or she should request an extension (which may be funded or non-funded) from the program managing organization or sponsor as early as it becomes evident that the extension will be needed. This request may require a written confirmation from the host institution's academic adviser explaining the need for the extension and/or explanation for the delay in completion, if applicable. Failure to request an extension might mean the student cannot continue to receive financial support to complete the program or maintain legal immigration status. Academic advisers must realize that sponsors are not always able to grant extensions, making it even more critical that original deadlines are met whenever possible.

f) **Academic or Practical Training / Employment.**

If the sponsor or program managing organiza-

tion provides the student's visa eligibility documents and controls their status throughout the educational or training program, the student's eligibility for academic or practical training, as well as employment, is an issue to be handled by the student and the program managing organization or sponsor. If the visa eligibility documents are provided by the host institution, it is essential that the sponsor's policies concerning academic or practical training be explicit so that such training is not granted in instances where it violates the policies of the sponsor. In each case, the student must be fully informed of the sponsor's position regarding eligibility for academic or practical training opportunities.

CONCLUSION

In the twenty years since the last edition of this publication, much has changed in the world of international education, and indeed, in the world in general. What has not changed is the ongoing need for clear and consistent communication between the sponsor, program managing organization, and educational or training institution. Although information sharing and communication has been facilitated and sped up by e-mail and the Internet, there is still a need for each partner in the sponsored student equation to understand the roles of the other partners and how to best work together, so that sponsored student programs can run smoothly. Host institutions still grapple with how to make the third-party billing process easier, and still desire more information from the sponsors and program managing organizations in order to better understand the policies and details of the programs they fund and administer. It is also an ongoing challenge for sponsors, program managing organizations, and host institutions to keep up to date with changes in which programs are being offered, who is managing them, and changes in personnel and policies at all institutions. Maintaining close communication with key contacts at all three institutions and sharing best practices with each other in the sponsored program administration community remains as important today as it was a quarter century ago.

Appendix: Partial List of Currently Active Program Managing Organizations

Africa-America Institute (AAI)
<http://www.aaionline.org/>

American Councils for International Education:
ACTR/ACCELS
<http://www.americancouncils.org/index.php>

AMIDEAST
America-Mideast Educational and Training Services
<http://www.amideast.org/>

Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE)
<http://www.cbie-bcei.ca/>

Council for International Exchange of Scholars (CIES)
<http://www.cies.org/>

Council of American Overseas Research
Centers (CAORC)
<http://caorc.org/>

Cultural Vistas
<http://culturalvistas.org/>

East-West Center
<http://www.eastwestcenter.org/>

FHI 360
<http://www.fhi360.org/en/index.htm>

Institute of International Education (IIE)
<http://www.iie.org/>

IREX (International Research & Exchanges Board)
<http://www.irex.org/>

LASPAU: Academic & Professional Programs for the
Americas
<http://www.laspau.harvard.edu/>

Partners of the Americas
<http://www.partners.net/partners/default.asp>

Winrock International
<http://www.winrock.org/>

World Learning
<http://www.worldlearning.org/index.cfm>

