

EAT Frequently Asked Questions for Community Partners

Thank you for opening your home to international students and scholars! EAT is a popular program that not only facilitates cultural exchange and understanding, but also gives international students and scholars a sense of community. Many participants have cited EAT as one of the most meaningful experiences that they have had in Nashville.

As you plan for your EAT event, please review the below frequently asked questions to help you prepare.

Who am I hosting?

EAT participants are international students (undergraduate, graduate, and professional) and scholars (postdocs, visiting students/scholars, and other researchers) at Vanderbilt University. Some are new to the U.S., while others have been in the U.S. for a long time. Some are here with families or significant others. You will receive information about your guests after you are matched. You will host between two and four guests at your EAT event.

What am I expected to do as a host?

As a host, you will host your guests in your home for a meal on the designated date. You are expected to communicate with your guests after receiving their information about the details of the meal.

What kinds of things do you look for in a host?

Our hosts come from many backgrounds. Some are single, some are married. Some have young families, while others are retired. Many hosts have lived or worked abroad, and others are former international students themselves. We appreciate the diversity in experience that our hosts bring!

Hosts must be open-minded and respectful of other cultures. Additionally, they must pass a criminal background check.

I live outside of Nashville. Can I still participate in EAT?

Absolutely! We have hosts who live in the suburbs of Nashville or in the neighboring counties. However, please be advised that many (if not most) of the students and scholars who participate in EAT do not have a car, so this could limit participation if you are unable to provide transportation.

Am I required to provide transportation?

No. We understand that hosts are already putting in a lot of time and effort into preparing a meal for their guests! On the application form, you will be asked if you are willing and able to provide transportation, but answering “no” will not remove you from consideration. With that said, most students and scholars do not have a car. If a host is unable to provide transportation, we try our best to match them with guests who can drive.

I have pets. Will that be a problem?

No! Many students and scholars love animals (some even bring their pets with them to the U.S.!). However, for a variety of reasons, some participants may feel uncomfortable around animals. If you have pets, please indicate this on your application. If you have an animal that gets very rambunctious or anxious around strangers, consider keeping them in a separate room while your guests are over.

What are things to consider when preparing the food?

You are welcome to prepare whatever you want for the meal! Students and scholars are usually very excited to try homemade American dishes. We only ask that you respect guests’ dietary needs. ISSS will inform you of any dietary preferences or food allergies that your guests disclosed on their application.

Some students and scholars may follow specific diets due to religious and cultural reasons. Some of the most common dietary preferences among EAT participants include:

- Halal: no pork (or pork by-products) or alcohol; meat must be prepared in accordance with Islamic law
 - Halal meat can be found in Middle Eastern grocery stores.
 - Fish is generally considered halal.
 - Many dishes compatible with vegan or vegetarian diets are compatible with halal diets.
- Vegan: no animal products or by-products
 - Important: Veganism is **not** the same as vegetarianism. Some vegetarians may eat fish, eggs, or dairy; vegans do not eat any animal products or by-products.

If you are not sure what to prepare for your guests, or what foods are compatible with certain diets, it’s okay to ask! Students and scholars appreciate the consideration that you give their dietary needs. (It’s also much better to ask, than to be in an awkward situation later on.)

Can I schedule the meal for a different date or time?

You should host the meal on the designated date. Please only sign up to host on dates that you will be available. If you are not sure if you will be available on a certain day, please do not select that date.

While ISSS generally recommends that you organize the meal for the evening (6pm – 8pm or close to it), you are free to arrange the meal earlier or later that day, if it works for all participants. Keep in mind, though, that ISSS advertises this as an evening event, so students and scholars usually have the expectation of a dinner.

I need to cancel my EAT date. What should I do?

As mentioned before, you should only sign up to host on dates on which you will be available. If you sign up for a date and realize later that the date will not work, please let ISSS know as soon as possible. We almost always have a waitlist of students and scholars, so we typically will not be able to re-match students and scholars if their host cancels on short notice.

With that said, ISSS understands that emergencies happen. If you have an emergency, please inform ISSS and your guests. You are welcome to reschedule the meal for a later date if all participants agree.

Can I take my guests to a restaurant rather than my home?

You are welcome to do this, but keep in mind that EAT is advertised as an opportunity to be invited to someone's home. This is usually what students and scholars expect out of the experience.

When will I know about the people I am hosting?

You will receive an email from ISSS confirming your placements at least two weeks before the designated date. If you have not received information from ISSS by then, you can assume that you have not been matched for that particular date.

Can I sign up for multiple dates?

Yes! However, we may not be able to match you on each date.

Can I make special requests (gender, language, nationality, etc.)?

You are welcome to make special requests on your application. Nevertheless, though we try our best to accommodate such requests when we can, we may not be able to do so.

What happens after I submit my application?

ISSS will send you a confirmation email within a week of receiving your application. All hosts must have a valid criminal background check on file before we will match them with students and scholars. If a background check is needed, you will receive an email from HireRight, the third-party vendor that Vanderbilt uses for background checks.

How and when should I communicate with my guests?

Once you receive your guests' information, you may begin communicating with them. We encourage you to contact them as soon as possible to facilitate logistical planning – the food, transportation, etc.

ISSS will provide you with your guests' contact information (and they will receive yours). All students and scholars will have an email, and most will have a US phone number. It is up to you and your guests to decide how best to communicate – email, text, Slack channel, etc. – but we recommend using email as your initial communication.

I have reached out to my guests, but I have not received any response. What should I do?

Students and scholars may be busy with studies or work, so you may not receive an immediate response. However, if you do not receive a response within 2-3 business days, please contact ISSS.

One of my guests cancelled. What do I do?

Please contact ISSS if this happens. If you are willing to host another student or scholar in their place, let us know. ISSS typically has a long waitlist. However, if it's very close to your EAT event, we may not be able to find a new placement.

One of my guests wants to bring a friend. Is that OK?

ISSS asks students and scholars to disclose on their EAT application if they plan to come with a friend or family member, and we share this information with hosts. However, if a student or scholar wants to bring someone else to the event, we leave it up to hosts to decide if they want to allow it.

Are there any topics I should avoid during the meal?

One of the most meaningful parts of EAT is the ability to learn about other cultures and perspectives. Many students and scholars are curious about American culture and may have questions; likewise, you may have questions about their country or culture. No topic is “off-limits.” However, be respectful of boundaries. Some guests may not feel comfortable discussing sensitive topics with someone that they have only just met. If you get the sense that students and scholars seem uneasy, it’s best to change topics.

When you receive your guests’ information, we will include each guest’s nationality and any information they provided about themselves on their application. If you aren’t sure of a safe place to start with conversation, you can always use the initial email as a starting point. Maybe you’ve been to their country (or it’s on your bucket list). Maybe your kids are learning their native language. Maybe the student mentioned that they love Boba tea, and so do you. Some hosts have found games and icebreakers to be good ways to facilitate conversation.

Important: Proselytization is strictly prohibited. If ISSS becomes aware of this happening, the host will be removed from the EAT program.