

SYE

SYE pairs Syrian and (on a pilot program) Iraqi students with mentors to navigate all aspects of applying to universities. They work with the students to help them secure full scholarships from the universities they are applying to.

Barriers to Syrian and Iraqi students from accessing higher education:

1. Immigration policies and how difficult it is for students to get visas. Many times, their students get full scholarships, but the visa fees become very difficult.
2. There are a lack of opportunities in Syria and Iraq
3. Challenges in infrastructure in the countries. For example in Syria there's only one center that conducts offline SAT, and that is in Damascus. All the students who want to take that test have to go to Damascus, which could be very, very risky at times. For online tests, the internet connection of many of the students is unreliable and certain applications such as Zoom have been blocked in Syria at times.
4. The costs of these tests. SYE covers all the test costs as part of their program—they cover both the SAT and the TOEFL.
5. The American system is complicated. It's not intuitive for students from other cultural backgrounds. For example, the essay is something that is very American. You tell your story which is something a student might not know if they have had no exposure to the American college application system.
“In the United States [college system], it’s about your dreams and your background and how the events that happened in the past shaped you as a person. This makes it particularly challenging for students who do not necessarily have the resources or the cultural background to know how to navigate it on their own.”

“In terms of retention, retention is not a problem because once our students get the opportunity to get the scholarships get the admission, they are in it for the long run.”

Application Process:

1. Online Application
2. Interview round

To make the process equitable, SYE gives underrepresented students more points based on specific metrics

About mentors: “We want our mentors to feel that they are part of a family of an organization and I pay a lot of attention to this.”

“So we try to recruit people that we know or people that we interacted with in the past that express interest. A lot of our mentors start by reviewing essays for our students. And then, after a

year or two when we feel that they are ready and when they feel that they have the time, the recruiting recruiting process starts.”

“Mentees inspire us tremendously.”

“You see a lot of our mentees who their top choice of a company, for example, to work for is the same company of the mentor.”

An impact is that a lot of participants become mentors themselves: “A lot of our students want to volunteer and become mentors as soon as they can.”

Advice for college communities: “Talk to the locals talk to the people on the ground who can tell you exactly what needs to be done and what is missing, and what they need”