



**Meridian International Center: Request for Proposals  
Study of the U.S. Institutes (SUSI) for Student Leaders from Europe  
Environmental Issues Institute**

**Issuance Date:** October 6, 2022

**Proposal Deadline:** November 23, 2022

**Estimated Funding Available:** \$165,000 – \$175,000

**Application Link:** <https://fs3.formsite.com/Meridian1630/gzp2pxriol/index.html>

**Meridian Contact:** [proposals@meridian.org](mailto:proposals@meridian.org)

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## Program Summary

The Study of the U.S. Institutes (SUSI) for Student Leaders from Europe is an intensive academic program whose purpose is to provide multinational groups of European undergraduate students the opportunity to deepen their understanding of U.S. society, culture, values, and institutions. The program will incorporate four-week academic residencies at three thematically focused Institutes, followed by a one-week educational study tour in a different region from the Institute to showcase the geographic, demographic, ideological, and institutional diversity within the U.S. The program will also include a three-day event in Washington, D.C. that will host all Institute groups. The goal of the program is to provide European student leaders with an in-depth examination of a specific field of study, while also developing their leadership skills and heightening their awareness of the history and evolution of U.S. society, culture, values, and institutions.

Meridian is seeking a program partner to join its current consortium of Institute partners to implement the **Environmental Issues Institute**. Qualified U.S.-based colleges, universities, community colleges, and affiliated higher education organizations based on a college or university campus that would like to be considered as a consortium partner for Meridian’s proposal should carefully review the information enclosed detailing proposal requirements and submit their proposal packages to the [linked application submission form](#) by no later than **Wednesday, November 23, 11:59 pm Eastern Standard Time**.

Questions regarding the RFP may be directed to [proposals@meridian.org](mailto:proposals@meridian.org) with subject line “SUSI for Student Leaders from Europe.” Meridian will not accept individual phone calls about the RFP. The full Department of State NOFO and POGI can be accessed [here](#).

Pending successful implementation of this program and the availability of funds in subsequent fiscal years, it is ECA’s intent to renew this cooperative agreement for an additional consecutive fiscal year before openly competing it again.

## Student Leaders from Europe Program

The Student Leaders from Europe program consists of three Institutes that include the four-week academic residency, an educational study tour, and closing conference for groups of 20 European undergraduate students aged 18 – 25 years old. Each Institute focuses on a theme relevant to U.S. policy priorities in the region. The Institute themes for the 2023 Student Leaders from Europe program are Civic Engagement, Environmental Issues, and Journalism and Media.

### *Environmental Issues Institute*

The **Environmental Issues Institute** should provide students with a multidisciplinary examination of the ways in which American communities address challenges related to the environment. Topics may include, but are not limited to, climate change, sustainable development, clean energy, conservation, environmental justice, ocean protection, pollution, economic impact,



public health, and the impact of climate change on underserved, youth, and minority populations and communities including indigenous people. The Institute will examine environmental issues at every level of society, ranging from specific challenges unique to the local host community to national and international environmental priorities. The Institute consists of three main program components, each of which is detailed below.

### *Academic Residency*

The academic residency is the main component of the Institute and consists of a four-week customized curriculum hosted on a university or college campus. The residency should incorporate a focus on American historical events as well as contemporary American life including current political, social, and economic debates in a pluralistic society related to the Institute topic. In addition to topics related to the overall theme of the program, the Institute should also address the influence of principles and values such as democracy, civil rights, social inclusion, freedom of expression, equality, and diversity of U.S. culture and society.

The academic program should include a diverse set of activities; including but not limited to seminars, lectures, experiential learning activities, site visits, workshops, group discussions, and exercises; that focus on the Institute theme for students to gain both theoretical and practical knowledge. The academic program should incorporate a variety of speakers, lecturers, and community members so that participants understand nuanced and diverse perspectives on environmental issues in the U.S. By building upon lessons learned in successive weeks, the curriculum should guide participants to understand complex challenges, theories, and solutions that address environmental issues unique to U.S. communities and shared among global communities.

The final component of the academic program is a **weekly leadership development series** that improves the students' leadership capacity. Weekly leadership sessions should focus on teambuilding, collective problem-solving skills, effective communication, and management skills, among others. Beyond building the participants' leadership capacity, the leadership series will culminate in the development of individual **community action plans (CAPs)**. CAPs are an effective tool for students to apply their knowledge gained from the academic program and leadership series. Students will identify an issue in their home community and create a plan of action to address it. Institute curricula should include a plan to assist and support CAP development and a final presentation during which students share a poster project detailing their CAP to Institute staff, relevant university and community leaders, and American students and peers. Meridian and Department of State representatives will also join either in-person or virtually. Meridian will support the implementation of CAPs when participants return home.

Though residences include a rigorous academic component, residencies should also incorporate opportunities to immerse students in the culture and community of the host institution. Institutes should include a community service component in which the students participate in **weekly volunteer service activities** and experience firsthand how not-for-profit organizations and volunteerism play a key role in U.S. civil society. Institutes should also incorporate **cultural activities and site visits** to fully immerse participants in the host community and maximize engagement opportunities with American peers. A **weekend homestay** with an American family



should be included during the program to provide participants with an opportunity to spend a weekend with a typical American family. Finally, Institutes should include a **SUSI Ambassadors** component that incorporates opportunities for European participants to attend cultural, volunteer, and leisure activities with American undergraduate peers.

### *Educational Study Tour*

Following each academic residency, participants will travel on one-week educational study tours to a different region from the academic residency. The study tours are opportunities for participants to take lessons learned and takeaways from the academic residency and observe how they are applied in a U.S. community different than their Institute community. The first part of the study tour includes a three-day visit to a different U.S. community that focuses on themes specific to the Environmental Issues Institute. The study tour then concludes with a three-day Closing Conference in Washington, D.C.

During the study tours, participants could engage in professional meetings with local community experts, visit local school systems, participate in brief workshops, and tour thematically relevant historical sites, among other activities. Through the educational study tours, participants can observe and participate in varied aspects of American life as they relate to the Institute topic and understand the rich cultural, economic, political, and social diversity in the U.S.

*Please note that Institute partners will be primarily responsible for developing itineraries for the educational study tours. Meridian International Center will support partners by organizing logistical arrangements for the study tour component of the program. Consortium partner institutions will coordinate closely with Meridian to create study tour themes and topics, identify potential resources for the study tour, and provide feedback on study tour itineraries so that study tours complement and reinforce the academic residency.*

### *Closing Conference*

The Student Leaders from Europe program concludes with a **Closing Conference**, hosted by Meridian International Center, in Washington, D.C. The Closing is a three-day program that creates group cohesion across the Institutes, reinforces a common SUSI brand and identity, celebrates participants' achievements throughout the Institutes, and prepares participants to transition to program alumni. Academic directors from the Institutes will be required to attend both the Study Tour and Closing Conference. *Please note that the timing of the Closing Conference is subject to change and could shift to a Program Launch.*

### Program Timeline

Eligible colleges, universities, community colleges, and affiliated higher education organizations based on a college or university campus that would like to be considered as an Institute partner should submit the online application and required documents no later than **Wednesday, November 23, 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time**. Applications received after this time will not be considered. All applicants will be notified of their proposal status by **Friday, December 2**. Meridian staff will be able to submit written feedback on unsuccessful submissions by



**Wednesday, December 21.** Please email the Meridian team at [proposals@meridian.org](mailto:proposals@meridian.org) to request written feedback. A timeline for proposal development and program implementation is included below.

October 18 and 19, 2022:	Q&A calls with prospective partners <i>without</i> previous SUSI experience
October 21, 2022:	Q&A calls with prospective partners <i>with</i> previous SUSI experience
November 23, 2022:	University Institute proposals due
December 2, 2022:	Institute selection
February 2023:	Subawards issued to Institute partners
June 24 – July 22, 2023:	Academic residency
July 22 – 26, 2023:	Educational study tour
July 26 – 29, 2023:	Closing Conference
Fall 2023 – Spring 2024:	Follow-on alumni activities

## Summary of Roles and Responsibilities

### Meridian will be responsible for the following aspects of the program:

- Arrange all international and domestic flights and logistics; J-1 visas and visa travel support; accident and health insurance; issuing M&IE and ground transportation stipend to participants *only during* the study tour and Closing Conference;
- Arrange study tour logistics and budget (in conjunction with selected academic institution);
- Implement all aspects of a 3-day Closing Conference;
- Monitoring and evaluate the program, including program participants, partner organizations, and resources;
- Develop follow-on/alumni activities, including creation and maintenance of an alumni database of success and impact stories (in conjunction with each Institute partner);
- Conduct narrative and financial reporting to ECA; and
- Monitor overall grant compliance and consortium management.

### Selected academic institutions' roles and responsibilities will include, but are not limited to:

- Develop 28-day intensive Environmental Issues academic residency focused on the designated themes, providing particular attention to the U.S. experience, its history, and its contemporary challenges;
- Create a carefully integrated and rigorous academic curriculum consisting of lectures, panel presentations, seminar discussions, debates, simulations, individual and group classroom activities, reading assignments, and other activities;
- Include a wide range of speakers that represent the diversity of American culture and people. Speakers should represent gender parity, diverse viewpoints, minority/ethnically diverse groups, etc.
- Prepare professors and speakers for sessions with students by sharing participants' academic interests, backgrounds, and level.



- Integrate a weekly leadership series that culminates in the creation of individual CAPs;
- Provide opportunities for participants to engage with American students and peers formally and informally throughout the program;
- Host welcome and departure events with campus leadership and relevant American peers;
- Implement academic and administrative orientations at the beginning of the Institute program;
- Coordinate, in collaboration with Meridian staff, all necessary on-the-ground logistics, including any necessary lodging, ground transportation needs, group meals and participant meal plans/M&IE, meeting space, etc.;
- Arrange and/or suggest opportunities for cultural exchange, volunteer activities, speaking engagements, civic participation, and networking opportunities;
- Include a weekend homestay with an American family for an opportunity for students to spend time with a typical American family;
- Develop opportunities for sharing and reflection on visitors' experiences;
- Garner local media coverage as possible and promote the project through social media, ensuring proper credit is given to the U.S. Department of State and Meridian;
- Develop study tour itinerary, including themes, topics, and local resources that will complement and elevate the Institute curriculum;
- Submit in a timely fashion course syllabi and program calendars;
- Submit required financial and narrative reports in a timely fashion;
- Maintain financial records; and
- Maintain regular communication with SUSI program staff

## RFP Q&A Sessions

Meridian will host **three Q&A sessions** about the RFP process and content. Meridian is offering **two Q&A sessions** for prospective partners *without* previous experience implementing a SUSI program *or* a SUSI Student Leaders program. During these sessions, Meridian will provide an in-depth overview about SUSI Student Leader implementation, partner expectations, and Meridian's RFP process. Ample time will be allocated for partner questions. These calls for new partners will occur October 18 and 19, 2022.

Meridian is also offering **one Q&A session** for prospective partners *with* previous experience implementing a SUSI Student Leaders program. This session will provide a brief overview of Meridian's approach to SUSI Student Leaders implementation and information on the RFP process. Ample time will be allocated for partner questions. The call for previous partners will occur October 21, 2022.

Meridian will document each of these calls and publish an FAQ document for applicant reference. If you are interested in participating in a Q&A session, please register to receive conference call information using the links below:

### *Calls for new prospective partners*

- Call 1: Tuesday, October 18 at 1:00 pm EDT: [please register here](#)



- Call 2: Wednesday, October 19 at 4:00 pm EDT: [please register here](#)

#### *Calls for previous partners*

- Friday, October 21 at 2:00 pm EDT: [please register here](#)

## Proposal Requirements

1. **Letter of intent on organization's letterhead** that describes your interest in hosting the institute, unique resources your institution's community offers, proposed staff, and cost share commitment. *Meridian will provide you with a template for this letter.*
2. **A maximum seven-page proposal** for the academic institute, including an overview of the Institute theme; plans for seminars and workshops; logistics, including housing; American community member and peer involvement with the program; and community service activities. Narratives should also include a proposed study tour city with a brief summary on study tour topics and themes. *Please note:* Meridian, in consultation with ECA, will determine selected study tour cities, topics, and resources.
3. **Appendices** to support proposed activities detailed in the narrative. Appendices should include, at minimum, a calendar of proposed activities, syllabus and bibliography, proposed course presenters (faculty) with bios, and key staff resumes. Proposed resource lists for the study tour are encouraged but not required.
  - Each Institute must identify one Academic Director and one Administrative Director, as well as any additional support staff. Additional key staff participating in the program (who are known at this time) should also be included.
4. **Budget and budget narrative:** Meridian requests that Institute partners use Meridian's budget and budget narrative templates. *Meridian will provide these templates.*
5. **Signed Nondisclosure Agreement:** Each Institute is required to agree to a nondisclosure agreement (NDA) with Meridian at the time of submission. The Meridian team will return a copy the fully executed NDA to all Institutes the next business day after the submission deadline for the Institute's files. *Meridian will provide each Institute a copy of the NDA for signature. Please note: If your organization already has an active NDA with Meridian, you are not required to submit another.*

## Proposal Narrative

Meridian requests that proposals do not exceed 7-pages to describe the proposed Institute. Here is a suggested outline of proposal sections.

- **Vision** – detail your interest in hosting the Environmental Issues Institute, your vision for the Institute, and the expected outcomes.
- **Institutional capacity, expertise, and special resources**
  - Institutional capacity
    - Prior experience implementing SUSIs or working with international professionals and programs, particularly with themes related to environmental issues. Experience with European students or delegations,



- particularly those from underserved communities, and/or experience implementing programs on environmental issues should be highlighted.
- Chart outlining the following information about your organization: mission, date of establishment, relevant expertise, past programmatic work, and ongoing programmatic work.
    - Previous awards from the Bureau since 2012 should be included as past or ongoing programmatic work. These programs should be listed by office (Citizen Exchanges, International Visitors, Academic Exchanges) and indicate project name, countries, year, and amount. Previous programming or expertise with European delegations and environmentally focused programs should be highlighted.
    - Include metrics whenever possible, such as number of years implementing ECA programs, number of academic residency programs, number of participants per program per year, and number of programs and/or participants focused on student education. Previous experience with European students should be highlighted.
  - Institutional profile
    - Past student leadership, international, or scientific and environmental programs/courses and unique resources that will be tapped for this program.
      - Include metrics on engagement and partnership with these programs, courses, and resources, including the number of programs, number of seminars and/or workshops, number of speakers and/or experts, and number of alumni engaged with these resources post-program.
    - Indicate programming strengths based on the Environmental Issues Institute theme.
  - Community profile: please describe your community and resources that complement the academic residency, including resources for cultural activities or community leaders, organizations, and companies that might participate in the program. Highlight specific ways in which your community is addressing or being affected by environmental issues. If possible, please provide letters expressing interest in the program from such individuals and/or organizations.
- **Academic Residency**
    - Program design: The academic residency should be a specially designed and well-integrated curriculum focused on the Environmental Issues Institute themes that imaginatively combines lectures, discussions, readings, debates, workshops, experiential learning, site visits, regional travel, and leadership development into a coherent program. It should be creative, thematically coherent, and draw upon institutional strengths. It should not replicate an existing lecture course, survey, or seminar designed for U.S. students.
    - Diversity: Participants should have the opportunity to hear from balanced and diverse perspectives on topics including U.S. history, government, civic



institutions, culture, and society. All programs should contribute to a deeper understanding of the U.S., while at the same time provide useful skills and concepts related to Environmental Issues. Describe how diversity, equity, and inclusion are necessary principles to understand Institute topics.

- Customized curriculum: Program design should be tailored to the Institute theme and maintain flexibility to match participants' individual interests. Efforts should be made to arrange for participants to present their country's history and culture to diverse groups of Americans.
- Leadership development: Outline weekly leadership series that culminates in the development of individual CAPs. Students should have an opportunity to work with university faculty and staff to develop their action plans. The leadership series should end with an opportunity for students to present their CAPs via a poster showcase to relevant university faculty and staff, community members, and students.
- Community action projects: Define how you intend to support CAP development throughout the program. CAPs should culminate in a final presentation at the end of the academic residency through a poster presentation or similar session. Final presentations should engage Institute staff, community members, and American peers.
- Monitoring and evaluation: Please share your plans for evaluating participant's residency experience and how feedback will be shared with Meridian and incorporated promptly into the residency.

- **Program Enhancements**

- Local resources and networks: Describe potential opportunities for participants to engage and network with a diverse group of American professionals, peers, and students working in relevant fields and living on campus/in the local community.
- Community service: The residency should plan for weekly hands-on volunteer activities to provide participants the opportunity to experience first-hand the U.S. tradition of grassroots approaches to solving community problems, as well as additional opportunities to meet and interact with diverse Americans outside an academic setting. Pre- and post-volunteer debriefing sessions should be offered. Volunteering alongside U.S. counterparts is a nice addition when possible.
- SUSI Ambassadors: Describe how you plan to develop a program that incorporates volunteer American undergraduate peers. SUSI Ambassadors may accompany program participants on formal and informal activities. Outline how you intend to recruit and vet interested undergraduate students on your campus.
- Diversity: Describe how you will ensure that the participants will meet U.S. citizens from a wide variety of backgrounds, representing socio-economic, ethnic, gender, and age diversity as much as possible.
- Cultural activities: Describe cultural activities you will incorporate into the program. Cultural activities should include a 2-night weekend stay with an American family. A description of vetting American homestay hosts is required. Include ideas for day trips or optional weekend excursions, designed to reinforce the academic curriculum, to various local and nearby locations, including historical



sites, schools, places of worship, etc. It is also important to keep some free time in the schedule for participants to exercise and relax with their American and European peers.

- **Study Tour**

- Suggest a city for the educational study tour that complements your proposed curriculum. Please include potential topics and themes that reinforce the academic portion of the program. The city should be a location that is geographically, demographically, and culturally diverse from the academic residency community.

- **Logistical Considerations**

- **Administrative orientation:** Please include a description of how the participants will be met at the airport and provided orientation at the host university. Administrative orientations should include an overview of administrative and logistical items specific to the Institute, such as campus tours and a meal plan overview.
- **Academic orientation:** Please include a description of how you will provide participants with a concise overview of the program, including principal objectives and major themes, as well as a discussion of expectations for participation.
- **Housing arrangements:** Participants should be housed on campus in 1-bedroom or 2-bedroom university dorms, similarly designated university housing, or other suitable locations. Walking distance to daily classes should be considered. Each participant should have their own private bedroom. Additionally, participants should have access to kitchen facilities, either in their own rooms or in a common room.
- **Meal arrangements:** A cafeteria meal plan combined with a cash allowance for food that will permit participants to cook or eat at local restaurants is strongly recommended. Applicants should plan to provide some group meals for the cohort. Meridian will notify the university partners of any dietary restrictions, and every effort should be made to accommodate them.
- **Access to resources:** Participants should have access to local resources, including campus libraries, computer and internet facilities, local and national newspapers, periodicals, and radio and television. A formal orientation to library services should be conducted during the first week of the program, and computer training and technical support should be provided for those participants with disabilities. Institutes are encouraged to include up to \$2,000 in funding for reasonable accommodations.
- Please budget for an opening or closing event at the host university.
- **Cultural Events:** Please describe some of the university community's unique opportunities for cultural events.
- **COVID-19 Contingency Planning:** Applicants should include a commitment to remain flexible in the event of COVID-19 contingency planning, as well as a brief overview of campus resources available to ensure participants' health and safety as it specifically relates to COVID-19. Please outline any specific COVID-19 protocol required by campus or institutional policy.



- **Staffing** – please describe your institute staff pattern.
  - **Academic Director:** Present throughout the academic program in its entirety to ensure continuity, coherence, and integration of all aspects of the academic program, including the study tour. The Academic Director will plan and implement programs at the host institution, oversee day-to-day management, and monitor program participants. This individual should have experience designing course curriculum as well as managing international study tours and demonstrable experience working with international visitors. Professional background related to Environmental Issues or a related field is strongly encouraged.
  - **Administrative Director/Coordinator:** Oversees all program support services, including supervision of the program participants, budgetary, logistical, and other administrative arrangements. This individual should have at least 2 years of experience managing these types of programs, including familiarity working with the host institution’s budget and finance office, as well as demonstrable experience working with international visitors.
  - Please outline additional staffing as needed, including volunteer drivers, intern support (which can be cost-shared), honorary “cultural ambassadors,” or graduate mentors, etc. All support staff and volunteers should exhibit cultural sensitivity, and understanding of the program’s objectives, and a willingness to accompany the participants as needed.

## Budget Guidelines

Please use the budget narrative template provided by Meridian and note the following:

- Meridian requests a minimum of 10% cost share in the Institute budget.
- The Institute will be required to host 20 international European undergraduate students.
- Please indicate dollar amount of each line item (if any) to be cost shared in the cost share column. The template will automatically calculate total costs.
- Meridian estimates \$165,000 - \$175,000 in federal funding will be available. Proposed budgets exceeding the estimate will be considered. Overall budget costs should be reasonable, allowable, cost-effective, and realistic for the programming proposed.

## Subaward Renewal

Participation as an Institute partner may be renewed annually, based on prior performance and the availability of funding, and at the U.S. Department of State and Meridian’s sole discretion, for one additional year. Meridian reserves the right to request updated budget or program documents, negotiate changes to programming or scope of work, and decide not to renew for future years.

## Review Criteria

Proposals will be considered based on the following criteria. The criteria are not rank-ordered, and each category carries equal weight in the evaluation:



### **Academic Residency**

- Applicant details a robust Environmental Issues Institute curriculum focusing on themes relevant to U.S. history, experiences, and contemporary issues. Applicant clearly demonstrates capacity to incorporate American scholars, peers, experts, students, and community leaders to teach curriculum and meet with participants during the academic residency;
- Applicant includes a comprehensive and effective leadership development series that includes weekly sessions and the development of a community action plan. Applicant includes an opportunity for students to present their community action plans during a poster session at the end of the Institute;
- Applicant incorporates experiential learning opportunities, including a diverse set of organized networking events, site visits, seminars, workshops, weekend homestay, cultural activities, and receptions throughout the residency;
- Opportunities for participant feedback and individual research are incorporated throughout the residency. Applicant commits to report relevant feedback to Meridian.

### **Mutual Understanding**

- Applicant demonstrates an understanding and appreciation of SUSI's benefits to the local community;
- Facilitated cultural activities offer participants opportunities to experience the diversity of the U.S. and interact with a diverse group of Americans;
- Opportunities are provided for participants to share experiences of their individual professional interests and home communities;
- Professional activities are designed to provide participants with the opportunity to have substantive engagement with American students and peers;
- Organized weekly community service activities represent a diverse set of thematic opportunities relevant to the overall Institute.

### **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)**

- Application clearly demonstrates a commitment to incorporating a variety of speakers, perspectives, and resources to showcase American diversity;
- Academic residency provides opportunity for participants to understand the importance of DEI in the U.S. and methods to incorporate DEI discussion in U.S. history and culture curricula in their home countries;
- Applicant explains how the Institute incorporates DEI to enhance the Institute's goals and objectives and the overall participant experience;
- A comprehensive diversity plan is included to demonstrate how the Institute will achieve diversity throughout the academic residency.

### **Past Performance**

- Key personnel have knowledge and experience implementing programs for international students and a strong knowledge of Institute themes and resources;
- Organization has past experience designing and successfully executing course curricula for international students and participants at their institution;



- Experience with European students, programs, and/or delegations are clearly highlighted and detailed.
- Experience designing and implementing curricula related to environmental issues are clearly highlighted and detailed.

### Logistics

- Orientation provides a strong introduction to the campus and surrounding community and covers key topics such as safety and sexual harassment prevention, program expectations and norms, and introduction to campus and community resources;
- Housing facility is appropriate for undergraduate students;
- A clear plan for providing meals, M&IE, and transportation is provided;
- Medical facilities and a staffing plan have been identified to support participant care needs that may arise, and a brief COVID-19 contingency plan has been included;
- Organization has the capacity and willingness to provide accommodations for participants with disabilities.

### Budget

- Overall budget costs are reasonable, allowable, cost-effective, and realistic for the programming proposed;
- Adequate staff time is budgeted to successfully implement the program;
- Reasonable lodging and other program costs are included for twenty participants for 28 nights;
- The budget narrative clearly details how the costs for each line item are derived.

## Application Submission Link & Proposal Templates

Please use the links below to submit your application for consideration as the Environmental Issues Institute partner in Meridian's SUSI for Student Leaders from Europe consortium. Also included below is a link to access required templates for use in your submission.

**Application Link:** <https://fs3.formsite.com/Meridian1630/gzp2pxriol/index.html>

**Required Proposal Templates:**

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1GFS5u0MGJUVSsJLHIKQFZw8h2OgAbv6m?usp=sharing>

