



## Experiences Canada Exchanges

# Application Guide

Avec la participation d'Échanges Canada  
du ministère du Patrimoine canadien



With the participation of Exchanges Canada  
of the Department of Canadian Heritage





## Embark on the experience of a lifetime!

Experiences Canada educational exchanges provide Canadian youth with the unique opportunity to discover Canada's proud history and heritage revealed by fellow Canadians' (youth and host families) eye-opening experiences that connect with another culture and language to bring classroom history and language textbooks to life.

Our exchanges are designed for youth between the ages of 12 and 17 years. The exchanges are a reciprocal homestay exchange; where groups of participants are twinned with another group of youth the same age from another province or territory and take turns staying in each other's homes.

Exchanges are typically seven to ten days in length, including travel time. Transportation costs for all eligible participants and organizers are paid by the Government of Canada through our youth exchanges program. The exchange groups fundraise to cover local transportation and other activity expenses when hosting the twin group.

Experiences Canada exchanges are intended to reach all Canadian youth, either school groups or youth affiliated with a recognized community organization. Special measures funding is available to encourage participation by youth with special needs or disabilities, low-income families, visible minorities, Aboriginal youth, and youth from rural or isolated areas.

All the stages of an exchange – the pre-planning, travel, hosting the twin group – provide participants with an opportunity to become involved in both communities, strengthen national identity, develop a greater understanding of Canadian history and heritage and make connections with youth from another part of Canada.

To apply for an Experiences Canada exchange, please [visit our website](#).



## Objectives of the Exchanges Program:

1. Contribute to increased knowledge and understanding of Canada among Canadian youth, by enabling them to learn first-hand about the history, heritage, geography, industry, institutions, cultures, communities, languages and other facets of their country;
2. Help young Canadians connect to one another and create linkages, across the country and between groups, thereby helping to strengthen the fabric of Canadian society;
3. Develop Canadian identity and a sense of belonging to Canada among youth by enhancing their appreciation of both the diversity and the shared aspects of the Canadian experience.

The group organizers must include the above objectives when submitting their exchange learning plan. Although a significant portion of our exchanges pertain to official languages including second-language learning opportunities, there are also many thematic and non-linguistic exchanges. Special consideration is also given to groups that have youth with special needs or disabilities, low-income participants, Aboriginal youth, visible minority youth, and participants from rural or isolated areas. (Please see page 6 for definitions).

**At least a third of exchange activities will promote an increased knowledge and appreciation of Canadian history and heritage.**

## ELIGIBILITY

- Your group is comprised of a minimum of ten participants, including youth and at least 2 adult chaperones 21 years or older, who have completed the necessary screening process;
- Participants are from a school group or a recognized community organization;
- The Experiences Canada Exchanges program is available to groups of youth between the ages of 12 and 17\* who are Canadian citizens, landed immigrants or have refugee status;
- All participants must be new to the exchange program.



***\*Participants must be 12 years old by March 31st of the year in which the exchange takes place and not yet be 18 years by March 31st of the year in which the exchange takes place.***

## **EXCHANGE GUIDELINES**

- Exchange activities **must contain a minimum of 30% of Canadian history and heritage.**
- The Group Organizer is responsible for the selection of participants.
- Exchanges typically last a minimum of seven days, including travel time.
- The Group Organizer matches participants with a youth from their twin group. Their families act as hosts during the exchange (Common Stays are an alternative home stay option).
- Each host family must successfully complete a host family screening process. The organizer will receive the necessary screening materials.
- ***All volunteers and adults age 18 and over living in the host family household are required to provide clear police record and vulnerable sector checks. The police record checks are in addition to the existing screening processes.***
- Parents/Guardians must be prepared to be actively involved in all aspects of the exchange (planning, carrying out, post-exchange activities).
- Group fundraising is to cover the cost of activities and local transportation when hosting the twin group.

## **APPROVAL PROCESS**

Once a group is twinned, the group organizer will receive access to a secure log in site on our website. Here, they will have access to all forms including the Organizer's Manual outlining the responsibilities and commitment necessary for a successful exchange. An Experiences Canada representative will keep the group organizers fully informed of each step of the exchange process. Once twinned, and all required forms are completed and submitted, we will then confirm the exchange and proceed with travel arrangements.



Selections (twinings) are determined based on the following factors:

- Priority will be given to those applications with a strong history and heritage content;
- Compatible demographics (ages, gender balance, size of group, etc.);
- Similar themes or interests;
- Compatible timeframe (summer vs school year);
- Equitable provincial and territorial distribution;
- Budget considerations.

## KEYS FOR A SUCCESSFUL EXCHANGE

### 1. Define Your Objectives

Exchanges are an ideal way to learn about Canadian history and heritage, cultural diversity, industry, rural and urban life or improve your second language. With clear defined learning objectives, the Experiences Canada staff will be able to twin you according to your learning plan.

### 2. Select Youth Participants

The group organizer is responsible for the selection of youth. Group organizers are responsible for ensuring that the selected youth and their families are aware of their roles and responsibilities throughout the exchange.

Experiences Canada funds the travel costs for youth and chaperones based on a ratio of ten youth to one chaperone. A typical group size ranges from ten to thirty youth. For larger groups, some participants may be responsible to cover their own costs.



### **3. Twin Your Group**

Experiences Canada will find a group that shares your group's objectives and interests in organizing the same types of activities. If your group would like to be twinned with a specific group, please identify this on the Application Form in the "pre-twin" section. Once we find a twin, the group organizers will be notified by email.

### **4. Plan Your Trip and Activities**

Exchanges typically last between seven and ten days, including travel time. The travel and hosting dates are at the groups' choice subject to availability and prices. It is essential to carefully plan the activities before, during and after the exchange.

It may be useful to agree on a joint project or theme, e.g. history, heritage, cultural diversity, geography, second language learning, arts or the environment, on which you will work with the twin organizer before, during and after the exchange. The exchange is an opportunity for the participants to get to know a community different from their own and, in many cases, to practice another language.

Everyone in the exchange group plays a role in designing the exchange. We will review all exchange learning plans that the group creates and will approve the itinerary as long as the learning objectives are being met within the activities.

We highly encourage you to invite Members of Parliament (MP's) to participate in your group activities and/or get your community involved. If an MP has visited your exchange, please indicate this when submitting your final evaluation report to Experiences Canada- Exchanges.

### **5. Organize a Fundraising Event**

Groups will need to raise funds to cover the additional cost of activities and local transportation, as well as registration fees where applicable. Fundraising events are an excellent way for participants to learn to cooperate with others and become involved in their community.

### **6. Continue To Communicate**

Once the twinned groups have hosted each other, the organizers should encourage continued interaction between the two groups in order to promote lasting links between participants and their communities.



### ***Remember!***

A successful exchange is, first and foremost, a carefully planned exchange. It is an exciting experience for the group that involves full participation of youth, parents and the organizers. Communication is key for a successful exchange. Experiences Canada will remain in constant presence throughout the exchange. It is strongly recommended that group organizers hold multiple information sessions with parents, youth and administration.

## **COSTS**

**The Government of Canada through the Experiences Canada- Exchanges program funds:**

- The travel costs of all eligible participants;
- Accommodation and meal expenses due to the travel itinerary;
- Financial assistance for Special Measures that may be granted. Speak to your Experiences Canada representative for more information (see definitions below).

**The Group pays for:**

- Initial annual Group Membership;
- Individual registration fees;
- Hosting-related expenses such as local transportation, supply teachers and activity costs while hosting the twin group or as agreed upon between the two organizers.

## **A PROGRAM FOR ALL CANADIAN YOUTH**

Experiences Canada encourages and supports the participation of all Canadian Youth to participate in an exchange, including youth from the following groups:



### **Youth with Special Needs or Disabilities**

A person with Special Needs or Disabilities is defined as a person with a long-term physical condition, mental condition, or health problem who is limited with respect to functions in the home, in school or other activities and/or requires special assistance to perform daily functions.

### **Youth from Low-Income Households**

A person who lives in a household earning less than the low income cut-off as defined by Statistics Canada is considered to be from a low-income household.

### **Visible Minority Youth**

A visible minority youth is defined as an individual, other than an Aboriginal person, who is non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour.

### **Aboriginal Youth**

Aboriginal is considered as First Nations, Métis or Inuit peoples.

### **Youth from Rural or Isolated Areas**

A person who lives in a community with a population of less than 10,000 is considered to be from a rural or isolated community.

## **ADDITIONAL FUNDING**

Additional funding, known as “Special Measures”, is available to encourage all Canadian youth to participate in an exchange. Where local resources are not available, additional monetary support may be requested to ensure accessibility. Experiences Canada will evaluate the needs and resources on a case-by-case basis. Special Measures may be requested for any of the following circumstances:



## **Youth with Special Needs or Disabilities**

For youth with special needs or disabilities, it is recommended that a detailed list of needs be identified. Needs could include modified vehicles, accessible home or special equipment, special care attendants, additional chaperones.

## **Common Stays**

Common stay is a term used for alternative home stays. There may be families that would have difficulties hosting a youth in their home. If there are circumstances that would prevent participants from being hosted in a home, arrangements could be made to have the groups stay in alternate housing or “common stay” arrangements such as a dormitory, school gym, youth hostel, community center. Funding may be requested to off-set some of these costs.

## **Visible Minorities and Aboriginal Youth**

Additional funding may be available to ensure that youth from Visible Minority groups or Aboriginal youth may participate fully in Experiences Canada Exchanges. Please speak to your Experiences Canada representative.

## **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **1. Organizers**

As the designated representative for the school/organization, you are responsible for all tasks related to:

#### **Taking the lead in planning and organizing the exchange**

- Submit application and communicate with Experiences Canada representative;
- Select the individual youth participants;



- Return all fees, forms and other required documents to Experiences Canada by the established deadlines;
- Communicate frequently with your twin organizer, administration, youth and parents;
- Organize information sessions;
- Ensure youth involvement with the planning and organizing of activities;
- Work with your twin's Group Organizer to match youth participants;
- Encourage parents to communicate with the twin's family prior to travel;
- Develop a budget;
- Take appropriate measures to ensure participants' security. Conduct the mandatory screening of host families, make sure members are adequately insured, make note of any medical conditions among group members;
- Implement the mandatory Host Family Screening procedures;
- Contact local media, MP and/or Mayor to inform them of the exchange or any special activities taking place during the exchange;
- Verify transportation itinerary to and from twin province with your Experiences Canada representative;
- Coordinate the hospitality for the visiting group with participants and their families, including local transportation, meals and accommodations according to the guidelines provided by Experiences Canada;
- The organizer is responsible for all participants. Experiences Canada does not make decisions regarding disciplinary or host-family related matters. Organizers are expected to deal with situations as they arise and take the necessary measures as appropriate. Our staff is available through emergency access 24 hours per day and can serve as a resource in these matters;
- Experiences Canada does not permit any travel alterations. All individual participants (Youth and Chaperones) must accompany the group including departure and return travel.



## Tips for Group Organizers

- Read the Organizers Handbook found on our website.
- Group organizers must be fully engaged and available to participate in both legs of the exchange.
- Be direct with participants and parents in terms of what the expectations are and what will be involved in planning and carrying out the exchange. Ensure that the group you are forming consists of committed youth and parents.
- Break down the workload and assign tasks to committees or individuals as soon as possible (even prior to your group receiving final approval). This way, everyone will know what he or she has to do and understand that the organizer is not solely responsible for every aspect of the exchange.
- Set up committees for host family screening, fundraising, activity planning, organizing and conducting meetings, media coverage, etc. Help with all aspects of your exchange can also be solicited from the school or community network.
- Make sure parents are aware that adult supervision in the home is required while hosting a twin and that youth participants should not be working while they are hosting.
- Submit an Exchange Learning Plan that reflects the Experiences Canada-Exchanges objectives, that fits within your budget and is manageable for your group.
- Organize the exchange, including activities before, during and after in keeping with Experiences Canada- Exchanges objectives.
- Raise awareness of the exchange with parents and throughout the community using information sessions, letters or local media, and serve as a liaison.
- Organize fundraising activities and establish partnerships with sponsors such as municipalities, businesses and community organizations or the local media.
- Be familiar with emergency procedures, dealing with media or reporting disclosures of child abuse, as outlined in the Host Family Guide. These apply to chaperones as well as to host families.



- Organizers must be satisfied with the home environment in which each participant is being hosted. Please use discretion in dealing with host family situations, bearing in mind that the safety and well-being of participants is of primary importance. Check in on your youth on a regular basis to ensure their level of comfort.
- If a participant alleges that any form of abuse (sexual, physical, emotional, psychological) or harassment has taken place toward him/her, that participant is to be removed from the home immediately and placed elsewhere. The authorities (either police or social services) should be notified. When not certain as to what constitutes a legal or illegal activity, call police and/or social services to verify. Fill out an Accident/Incident Report and inform Experiences Canada immediately.
- If the host family is not comfortable with the participant in their home (see Host Family Guide for details), make arrangements to have the delegate moved to another pre-screened home. Fill out an Accident/Incident Report and send to Experiences Canada within 24 hours.
- Note any medical conditions that participants may have and ensure that host families are aware.
- Determine what action is to be taken if a participant breaches any of the program rules. If the participant is returned home, fill out an Accident/Incident Report and send to Experiences Canada within 24 hours.
- Group organizers assure the safety and security of all participants and of their chaperones throughout the whole exchange and have the responsibility to make decisions concerning the activities happening before, during and after the exchange.
- Both organizers and participants must evaluate their experience using questionnaires which will be emailed to you close to the end of the exchange. The results will help assess the impact of Experiences Canada Exchanges and allow us to improve programming for future participants.
- Encourage continued interaction between the groups in order to promote lasting links among participants.
- Encourage youth to share the experience with other groups.



## **2. Youth and Parents**

- Participate fully in all activities during both legs of the exchange, travel with the group to and from destination;
- Take an active role in the planning and organizing of the exchange under the direction of the group organizer, and participate in the end evaluation;
- Attend all information sessions;
- Share the experience with other youth, schools and the community at large via meetings, articles in local newspapers or interviews;
- If your child requires any special needs while on exchange, fill out the appropriate medical forms provided from the group organizer, speak with the group organizer about your child, and speak with the family who will be hosting your child. If you have been selected to host a child with special needs, speak to the parents prior to the child staying with you. Develop a strong rapport with family. Ensure that all safety measures will be taken to ensure the health and safety of the participant is the number one priority.

## **3. Experiences Canada is responsible for:**

- Supporting safe experiential learning opportunities through national exchanges;
- Ensuring fair and equitable national distribution of the youth exchanges;
- Following all policies, procedures, and reporting requirements outlined by Exchanges Canada for the administration of the program;
- Working with the group organizer to ensure that all aspects of the exchange are well planned and organized;
- Providing all the necessary tools to assist in the planning of the exchange.