



Youth Exchange Program

Application Guide for Group Organizers

Funded by the Government of Canada
Financé par le gouvernement du Canada

Canada 

Embark on the experience of a lifetime!

Experiences Canada's Youth Exchange Program exchanges provide Canadian youth with a unique opportunity to discover Canada's proud history and heritage through travel with peers. The reciprocal exchanges empower youth by connecting them with communities other than their own, other cultures, languages and experiences that deliver learning outside the classroom.

The Youth Exchange program is designed for youth between the ages of 12 and 17, and are based on a reciprocal homestay model, where groups of youth are twinned with another group of youth from another community in Canada – in another province or territory - and take turns staying in each other's homes for a week.

Exchanges are typically seven days in length, including travel time. **Transportation costs for all eligible youth participants and chaperones are covered by the program, with funding from the Government of Canada's Department of Canadian Heritage.** Each exchange group fundraises to cover local transportation and other activity expenses incurred during the exchange.

Experiences Canada exchanges are open to all Canadian youth, in groups organized either through schools, or through recognized community organizations. **Additional special measures funding is available to reduce barriers to participation faced by youth with special needs or disabilities, from low-income families, visible minorities, Indigenous youth, and youth from rural or isolated areas.** (please see page 8 for definitions).

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 lifelong 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.

Each exchange Group Organizer must put together a hosting plan that will reflect the objectives above. Although a significant portion of our exchanges pertains to official languages including second-language learning opportunities, there are also many thematic and non-linguistic exchanges, including culture, history and sports.

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

ELIGIBILITY

- Eligible groups are comprised of a minimum of ten youth participants between the ages of 12 and 17, plus 2 chaperones 21 years or older, who have completed the necessary screening process;
- Youth participants are from a school group or a community organization;
- Youth must be Canadian citizens, landed immigrants or have refugee status, and 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 content.
- The Group Organizer is responsible for the selection of youth participants.
- Exchanges typically last a minimum of seven days, including travel time.
- Group Organizers match youth participants with a youth from their twin group. Their families act as hosts during the exchange (Common Stays can be an alternative hosting option, where common stays may not be possible).
- Each host family must successfully complete a host family screening process. The applications and references are to be reviewed by the Group Organizers prior to the issuing of the group flight tickets.
- All volunteers and adults age 18 and over living in the host family household are required to provide the Group Organizer and Experiences Canada with a 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.
- Group Organizers must complete mandatory online training.
- Groups should reach out to their local Member of Parliament to notify them of the Exchange and potentially invite them to an activity.
- The exchange must be branded as an Experiences Canada project, in all social media, materials, blogs, etc.
- All participants (Group organizers, parents, and youth) must complete surveys after the exchange is complete.
- Group Organizers will assign one youth as the Youth Ambassador who is the lead in sharing photos, quotes, social media posts etc. with the Experiences Canada communications team.
- **Groups will send testimonials and photos/videos to our communications team at communications@experiencescanada.ca.**

APPROVAL PROCESS

Once groups are twinned, and all required forms are completed, the membership fee and registration fees are paid by both groups, the exchange will be confirmed, and groups will proceed with registering their participants. At this stage, travel tickets will be reserved. An Experiences Canada representative will keep the group organizers fully informed of each step of the exchange process.

Twinnings 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 / availability.

KEYS TO A SUCCESSFUL EXCHANGE

1. Define your learning 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 clearly defined learning objectives, the Experiences Canada staff will be able to best twin you according to your learning plan.**

2. Determine your optimal group size and select youth participants

Each Group Organizer is responsible for selecting youth who will participate in the exchange and for twinning them with a youth in their twinned group. Group Organizers are responsible for ensuring that the selected youth and their families are aware of their roles and responsibilities throughout the exchange.

The program 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 sixty youth. For larger groups, some participants may be responsible to cover their own costs.

3. Engage with your twin group

Experiences Canada will match you with 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 your twin group is confirmed, it is recommended that you contact your twin Group Organizer and engage in frequent communication to plan both legs of the exchange.

4. Plan, plan, plan!

Exchanges typically last seven 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 Group 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 notify Experiences Canada.**

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. Stay in touch with your twin

Once your exchange is completed, Group 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 - it is strongly recommended that group organizers hold multiple information sessions with parents, youth and their respective organizations/schools. **The Experiences Canada team is available to provide support throughout the exchange process.**

COSTS

The Government of Canada through the Experiences Canada Youth Exchanges Program funds:

- The travel costs of all eligible participants;
- 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 fee;
- 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 (definitions as per the Department of Canadian Heritage):

- **A person with Special Needs or Disabilities**
 - 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**
 - An individual, other than an Indigenous person, who is non-Caucasian in race or non- white in colour.
- **Indigenous Youth**
 - Indigenous 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.

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. **Group Organizers can submit an application for special measures once their exchange has been confirmed.**

Experiences Canada will evaluate the needs and resources on a case-by-case basis. Special Measures may be requested to remove barriers to participation including for youth with special needs or disabilities, Indigenous youth, youth from low-income households or provide support for Common Stay arrangements.

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.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Group Organizers

As the designated representative for the school/organization, Group Organizers are responsible for all tasks related to taking the lead in planning and organizing the exchange, including:

- Submitting a completed application and communicating with Experiences Canada representative;
- Completing your online mandatory training;
- Selecting the individual youth participants;
- Submitting all fees, forms and other required documents to Experiences Canada by the established deadlines;
- Selecting one youth participant as your group's Youth Ambassador;
- Communicating frequently with your twin organizer, administration, youth and parents;
- Organizing information sessions;
- Ensuring youth involvement with the planning and organizing of activities;
- Working with your twin's Group Organizer to match youth participants;
- Encouraging parents to communicate with the twin's family prior to travel;
- Developing a budget;
- Taking 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;
- Ensure that the exchange is branded as an Experiences Canada project;
- 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 a day, 7 days a week and can serve as a resource in these matters;
- Complete the Post-Exchange surveys;
- Send testimonials and photos/videos to our Communications team at communications@experiencescanada.ca;

Tips for Group Organizers:

- 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.
- Note that Experiences Canada does not permit any travel alterations. All individual participants (Youth and Chaperones) must accompany the group including departure and return travel;
- 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 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 gauge 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;
- Note that Experiences Canada does not permit any travel alterations. All individual participants (Youth and Chaperones) must accompany the group including departure and return travel;
- 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.
- Complete the Post-Exchange surveys;

3. Experiences Canada is responsible for:

- Supporting safe experiential learning opportunities through national reciprocal exchanges;
- Ensuring fair and equitable national distribution of the youth exchanges through its application and selection process;
- 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.
- Arrange and pay for the travel costs for the exchange groups.

How to Apply

To apply for a Youth Exchange, please visit our [Exchanges page](#).

If you have any questions, please first review our [Frequently Asked Questions](#).

If you'd like to connect with Experiences Canada about starting your exchange experience, you can email info@experiencescanada.ca or call 613-727-3832 (toll-free: 1-800-387-3832) and a member of our staff would be happy to help you.

Please note: our business hours are Monday to Friday, 8:30am-4:30pm.

What you need to apply for an Experiences Canada Youth Exchange

When filling out the Application Form, you will be asked to provide the following:

- Acknowledgement that you have approval from your school/School Board/organization to conduct a youth exchange
- Name of Principal/President with authority to legally bind the group & sign the Group Acknowledgement Form
- Group Organizer name, contact information, & affiliation

Group Description & Demographics:

- Age range
- Grade level
- Mother tongue
- Sex of youth & chaperones – approximate number

An indication of how many youth in your group fall into the following categories:

- Youth with Special Needs and/or Disabilities (i.e. a person with a long-term physical condition, mental condition, or health problem)
- Youth from Low-Income Households.
- Visible minority youth.
- Indigenous youth. Member of a First Nation, a Métis or an Inuit
- Youth from Rural or Isolated Areas.

Exchange Request:

- Do you have an educational/thematic focus? If so, please select your PRIMARY and SECONDARY focus.
- Are you applying for a bilingual exchange?
- Are you requesting a specific twin? If yes, provide the name and contact info of the Group Organizer
- What are your preferred Travel and Hosting periods (month/year)?