

Group Organizer's Manual

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Glossary

Group Organizer (GO)	You! The lead for the exchange; the head chaperone, parent contact, and point of contact for Experiences Canada and your exchange group.
Group Organizer Portal (GO Portal)	The GO Portal is your unique, secure, online hub for uploading required documents and keeping track of your exchange. This is where you will see Youth registrations, Host Applications, Police & Vulnerable Sector checks, and other documents uploaded by your parents regarding your exchange. The portal also has resources for supporting a successful exchange, links to provide parents / chaperones, and links to important pages on the Experiences Canada website.
Homestay Exchange	An exchange where participants stay at one-another's homes for the duration of the trip – billeting.
Common Stay Exchange	An exchange where participants stay in a supervised area together for the duration of the trip. Examples include campsites, church basements, and school gyms.
Twinning	The pairing of your group with another group in our system.
Notice of Twinning	Official offer of twinning from Experiences Canada which details your potential twin groups contact details, group size, participant age range, exchange theme, and location.
Pre-Twin	When two groups request one another on their exchange applications.
Twin Group	The group we match you with for your exchange.

Membership Fee	The non-refundable $250 annual membership fee paid on behalf of your group.
Registration Fees	The non-refundable $250 fee each participant pays to take part in the exchange (including chaperones).
Host Family	The family of a youth participant who hosts a youth from your twin group in their home during the exchange (must fill out Host Application, submit Police & Vulnerable Sector checks, and have 2 Host References).
Exchange Learning Plan	A preliminary summary of objectives and activities that will occur before, during, and after the exchange. The Exchange Learning Plan includes Learning Objectives (history, educational, cultural, linguistic, thematic, social etc.) and Learning Strategies (activities that will be organized pre-, during and post-exchange).
Subsidized Youth	A youth participant who is new to the program, between the ages of 12-17, and meets all eligibility criteria; a youth funded by Experiences Canada.
Unsubsidized Youth	A youth participant who has either participated previously, is over the age of 17, or doesn't meet eligibility criteria; a youth not funded by Experiences Canada.
Unsubsidized Chaperone	An additional chaperone who does not meet the eligibility criteria (not for gender balance, or support of special needs youth) to be counted as an official chaperone; a chaperone not funded by Experiences Canada.

1.0 - Experiences Canada Youth Exchange Program Description

1.1 Overview

The Experiences Canada Youth Exchange Program, with funding from the Department of Canadian Heritage, facilitates enriching educational exchanges for youth between the ages of 12 and 17 that enhance learning and give participants an experience that lasts a lifetime.

Who Can Go on an Exchange?
The Experiences Canada Youth Exchange Program is available to groups of youth between the ages of 12 and 17 who are Canadian citizens, landed immigrants, or have refugee status.

Groups are school-based or from a recognized community organization and comprised of 10-60 youth. Slightly smaller or slightly larger groups may be possible; speak to your Experiences Canada representative for details.

The Experiences Canada Youth Exchange Program is a reciprocal homestay experience involving the twinning of groups from different provinces or territories. Transportation costs between exchange destinations are covered for eligible youth participants, chaperones, and Group Organizers.

Groups are twinned based on similar demographics and educational objectives. Once an exchange has been approved, Group Organizers will match individual participants of similar age and interests together for the homestay element of the program.

Exchange groups pay for all local transportation and educational activities during their exchange. To cover these costs, groups typically organize fundraising activities.

Where Do Exchanges Take Place?
The Experiences Canada Youth Exchange Program offers youth the opportunity to travel to a different province or territory within Canada. Participants learn about the local culture, view local attractions, and stay with host families. They also celebrate their own community while hosting their twin on the reciprocal visit.

When Do Exchanges Happen?
Groups can travel at any time during the year. Both exchange weeks are a minimum of 7-10 days each, including travel.

Applying at least 60 days prior to your intended exchange dates is recommended to provide sufficient time for any necessary approvals, planning your exchange, paying fees,

booking travel, etc.

Special Considerations
Groups with unique circumstances that would prevent them from hosting a reciprocal homestay can contact Experiences Canada to discuss these circumstances and whether alternate arrangements such as common stays can be considered. See section 3.6 for more information regarding Special Measures funding.

1.2 Program Objectives

The Experiences Canada Youth Exchange Program objectives are:

- To enhance participants' knowledge and understanding of Canada.
- To connect Canadian youth and create linkages with one another.
- To help young Canadians enhance their appreciation of the diversity and shared aspects of the Canadian experience.

1.3 Roles and Responsibilities

The success of an exchange depends on the close cooperation of everyone involved. It is important to be clear on roles and responsibilities from the start.

Youth participants are responsible for:

- Participating fully in all activities during both halves of the exchange.
- Taking an active role in the planning of the exchange under the direction of the Group Organizer (such as helping to plan the itinerary, fundraising, and completing required paperwork within timelines).
- Staying informed about the exchange by attending meetings and information sessions.
- Respecting the Code of Conduct and acting in a manner that positively represents Experiences Canada and their school or organization.
- Hosting a twin during their exchange and making them feel welcome.
- Sharing exchange experiences with other group members, members of the community, and with the local Members of Parliament.
- Completing the evaluation questionnaire once the exchange is over.

Group Organizers
As the designated representative for their group's organization, Group Organizers are responsible for all tasks related to:

1. **Planning and leading the exchange**

- Taking the lead in the planning and organizing of the exchange.
- Submitting an application and communicating with Experiences Canada.
- Researching the host community (See Historica Section / Link).
- Branding the exchange as an Experiences Canada project.
- Selecting the individual youth participants of the group according to organizational criteria.
- Communicating frequently with the twin Group Organizer.
- If applying from a community group, the Group Organizers must submit proof of the **Group Liability Insurance coverage** (for Community Groups only).
- Organizing information sessions for all exchange participants, parents, and chaperones to provide information on Experience Canada's Youth Exchanges Program.
- Ensuring youth involvement in the planning and organizing of activities for the exchange.
- Encouraging parents to communicate with the twin's family prior to the exchange.
- Developing a budget for the program.
- Coordinating 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.
- Designating a Youth Ambassador to document and report on the exchange.
- Contacting local media, MP, and/or Mayor to inform them of the exchange or any special activities taking place during the exchange.
- Encouraging participants and parents to complete surveys after the exchange is complete.
- Sending quality testimonials and photos to: communications@experiencescanada.ca
- Completing all final reporting required by Experiences Canada.

2. **Following all policies, procedures, and reporting requirements as outlined by their organization and Experiences Canada**

- Developing a detailed hosting itinerary that meets the current program guidelines which requires a minimum of 30% of each exchange week's activities to be history or heritage related.
- Implementing the mandatory Host Family Screening procedures according to guidelines, keeping all relevant documentation in a secure location, and selecting all host families.
- Completing and submitting all Experiences Canada forms within the required timelines including relevant statistical information and evaluations for the

exchange program.
- Participating in onsite monitoring as requested by Experiences Canada.

3. **Ensuring the safety and security of youth participants**

- Becoming familiar and complying with the policies and procedures of both organizations relating to participation in exchanges, travel, billeting, and emergency procedures.
- Developing a Code of Conduct and safety procedures for the group while on exchange. Please see our Code of Conduct for further information.
- Accompanying the group to the exchange location or designating another adult chaperone, with the authorization of the school or association, to accept and take responsibility for the group. Accompanying chaperones must participate in all activities during both halves of the exchange.
- Destroying all confidential information gathered during the exchange process after the exchange is complete. Experiences Canada adheres to all standards set out in the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act for information shared digitally or uploaded to the Group Organizer Portal.

Chaperones
Chaperones are responsible for supporting the work of the Group Organizer:

- Assisting the Group Organizer in planning, delivery, and supervision of the exchange.
- Communicating frequently with the Group Organizer and participating in information sessions.
- Following all policies, procedures, and reporting requirements as outlined by Experiences Canada.
- Participating in onsite monitoring as requested by Experiences Canada.
- Participating in and supervising all activities during both halves of the exchange, ensuring the safety of youth.
- Ensuring all participants have proper identification and emergency contact numbers prior to travel.

Parents / Guardians of the Participants
Parents / guardians of the participants are responsible for:

- Staying informed about the exchange by attending information sessions.
- Supporting the exchange experience.
- Providing written consent for their child to participate in the program.
- Completing and signing all required forms (refer to forms list).
- Informing the Group Organizer of any special circumstances relating to their child

and providing full disclosure of medical / health concerns to ensure proper steps are taken to accommodate special needs.

- Taking responsibility for their child's actions during the exchange (ensuring Code of Conduct signed off).
- Agreeing to their child travelling with the group at all times; **no travel alterations are permitted.**
- Playing an active role in the exchange while hosting the twin group.
- Contacting the twin family prior to the exchange to discuss all relevant information.
- If family circumstances allow, hosting a participant from the twin community, ensuring their well-being and proving adult supervision at all times.

Please note:

- ***If your child cancels his / her participation in the exchange after the airline ticket has been purchased, it is the family's responsibility to cover the lost ticket costs.***
- ***If your child is removed from the exchange and flown home, parents are responsible for the cost of the additional ticket and transportation costs.***

Experiences Canada
In partnership with Exchanges Canada at the Department of Canadian Heritage, Experiences Canada is responsible for all aspects of:

- 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 and youth to ensure that all aspects of the exchange are well planned and organized.
- Providing the necessary tools to assist in the planning of the exchange.
- Funding cost of travel.
- Booking travel through our travel partner.

The Government of Canada – Exchanges Canada
In partnership with Experiences Canada, Exchanges Canada is responsible for funding:

- Travel costs of all eligible participants and organizers from community to community, including airport improvement taxes.
- Costs associated with overnight stays during travel.
- Additional funding that may be required for groups with special needs.



2.0 - The Exchange Process

Experiences Canada staff are available to help Group Organizers through the application, approval, planning, and wrap-up of your exchange. The full process consists of 6 steps, as outlined below.

2.1 Summary of the 6 Steps of an Exchange

Steps	***Exchange Process Description***	***Group Organizer Documents / Timeline***
Step 1: Application	• Group Organizers complete an online application to initiate their group's exchange request. • A non-refundable membership fee of $250 is charged for the application submission.	$250 membership fee to be paid within 5 days of receipt prior to moving to the next step.
Step 2: Twinning	• Once a twin group is found and approved, Experiences Canada will send a Twinning Notice to both twin groups. • The two groups connect and decide if they will accept or decline their twinning. • If there are delays or multiple declines in acceptance, you may be added back to the twinning pool so other groups can move forward.	• Group Organizers have 5 days to connect with their twin and decide if they will accept or decline their twinning. • Send back your twinning notice to EC.
Step 3: Confirmation	Once both groups accept their twinning, the following will be required for your exchange to be confirmed. • Group Organizers have 5 days to provide the Participation Agreement, travel dates for their group, and the number of participants travelling. Once EC has all this information, a registration invoice will be sent for the number of travelers. • Group Organizers have 10 days from the twinning acceptance date to pay this invoice. Payment must be received prior to moving to the reservation step.	Group Organizers must submit the following 4 items: 1. The signed Participation Agreement 2. Requested travel dates 3. Number of participants travelling These 3 items are to be submitted 5 days from twinning acceptance. Once EC has received this information, the registration invoice will be sent (the # of participants x $250). 4. Registration invoice payment is to be made 10 days from the invoice date.

Step 4: Reservation	• Once all previous documents and registration fee payment have been submitted, we will be able to begin reserving travel and groups will begin registration of youth, chaperones, and hosting families. EC's travel provider holds tickets for the group's travel. • Access to Group Organizer Portal and exchange resources are provided to Group Organizers.	• Parents confirm registration information for their youth within 15 days of receipt of email. • Hosting application (if applicable) to be filled out by parents within 15 days. • Chaperones register their information within 15 days. • References and Police Background Checks to be submitted through the Group Organizer Portal no later than 45 days prior to travel
Step 5: Tickets & Travel	Once all previous steps are finalized, travel will be secured, and tickets issued. • Hosting Activity Plans, Exchange Budget, and Pre-Exchange Activities are submitted to EC. • Travel tickets issued. • **Exchange Group travels! Yeah!**	The following documents must be received at least 45 days before travel: • Hosting Activity Plans • Exchange Budget • Pre-Exchange Activities
Step 6: Post-Exchange Activities	Once both groups have traveled, post-exchange activities are sent out to help EC with future programming and reporting. • Post-exchange surveys for Experiences Canada and the Department of Canadian Heritage. • Post-exchange activities – photos, videos, blogs, testimonials from the group shared. • Financial and Monetary Report submitted to Experiences Canada.	• Surveys are important for programming purposes for EC and the funder. They are easier to complete when they are done right after travel. • Share photos, videos, etc. • Send Financial and Monetary Report.

2.2 Detailed Description of the Steps

Step 1: Application

Applications are submitted online. If you are unable to access the online application, please reach out to Experiences Canada and we will provide an alternative option.

Once your application is submitted, you will receive an automated reply confirming

reception. We will then send you the Group Organizer Acknowledgement to complete and return along with an invoice of $250 for your non-refundable membership fee, which is payable within 5 days of receipt. Failure to pay the membership fee will prevent the exchange group from moving to the twinning process.

Step 2: Twinning
Once your application is complete, Experiences Canada will twin your group by finding a compatible group with similar demographics and interests. Experiences Canada will then provide you with a Notice of Twinning, at which point you will be given the location of your exchange as well as your twin group's information and a link to a form to accept or reject the twinning. Please contact your twin Group Organizer, discuss learning objectives, goals of the exchange, travel/hosting dates, and group demographics.

Both groups must submit their acceptance of twinning within 5 business days to confirm the twinning and proceed to the next step.

Youth Selection Process
Group Organizers may use discretionary selection processes to choose youth participants such as writing contests, a pre-formed group (class / community group), or other criteria set by the organizer.

A reminder that youth 12-17 years of age from across Canada are eligible to participate in the Experiences Canada-Exchanges program. They must be a Canadian citizen, landed immigrant, or have refugee status. Youth under the age of 12 can participate if Exchanges Canada will allow reasonable exceptions for youth who are under 12 providing that:

- Participants should already be part of an existing group (i.e. mixed class of 11-12 year olds).
- Groups should not actively recruit members outside of 12 and 17 years of age.
- The percentage of youth outside the 12-17 year range should represent a minimum of the group (i.e. 10% or less).
- These youth are registered participants, pay the registration fees, and submit all required forms.
- Individual requests will be reviewed, approved, and documented on a case-by-case basis.

Please note that **all participants must be new to the exchange program,** as youth can only be funded by the Department of Canadian Heritage once.

Step 3: Confirmation
To confirm your exchange, groups must submit a signed Participation Agreement, their requested (and agreed with their twin) travel dates, and number of participants within 5 days of twinning acceptance. Groups are required to pay a $250 non-refundable

registration fee per participant (including adult chaperones). An invoice will be sent to the Group Organizer with payment method options outlined.

Please submit ONE payment to Experiences Canada to cover all registration fees for the group. Payment is due within 10 business days of the invoice. Note that groups will not proceed to the next step until the registration fee payment is received by Experiences Canada.

When submitting your travel dates, please note that we try our best to accommodate all requests. However, factors such as flight schedules and availability determine final travel dates. Early submission of your travel dates improves the likelihood of meeting your request.

Please also note that due to safety and travel logistics, Experiences Canada **does not allow for travel deviations.** All individual participants must accompany the group for **the duration of the program** including departure and return travel.

Step 4: Reservation
Once documentation and registration fees are paid, the parents of each youth will receive by email (email information to be provided to Experiences Canada by the Group Organizer) a link to complete an online registration for their youth, including all pertinent information for travel booking. The Group Organizer and chaperones (who will also receive a link) must register online. **Registered names should be identical to legal documents (i.e. Government-issued ID)** as these will be the names submitted for travel tickets. Note that participant waivers must also be signed as part of the registration process. Should you need to change any of the information, please contact your Experiences Canada representative. The Group Organizer is responsible for verifying all registered names and information.

Host family applications (online form), references, and screenings also take place during this step. If any host families require more than one hosting application (i.e. when parents live in separate households and both may host a portion of the exchange), please contact your Experiences Canada coordinator and a separate application form will be sent.

Group Organizers will be provided with a dedicated link to a secure web portal (or Group Organizer / GO Portal) where they will have access to their youth registrations, forms, templates, additional information and other resources to support a successful exchange. This secure link is not to be shared. Organizers will have to create their own password by clicking “Forgot My Password” and following the steps outlined. This password is not to be shared.

All youth participants, adult chaperones, and Group Organizers must submit waiver and consent forms to Experiences Canada. Should parents/guardians not be able to register their child online, the organizer will enter the information on the secure website on behalf

of the family.

Note: If access to online documents is a barrier for parents or youth of your group, please contact Experiences Canada (info@experiencescanada.ca) and we will provide you with alternative means of registration.

Step 5: Tickets and Travel
Please note that travel documents cannot be released until Experiences Canada has received all the required documentation, completed and signed. This includes:

- Paid membership fee (Step 1)
- Final travel dates and number of participants (Step 3)
- Your signed Participant Agreement (Step 3)
- Paid registration fees (Step 3)
- All youth registrations, host applications, and travel documents (Step 4)
- Statement of the Group Organizer (Step 4)

It is IMPORTANT that the Group Organizer verifies each participant's name is accurate, as revisions are subject to fees after the tickets are issued.

The **Statement of the Group Organizer** is sent to the GO by their exchange coordinator once all youth and chaperones have completed registration. It can be submitted electronically.

Once the names list is confirmed and the Statement of the Group Organizer is completed, the Group Organizer will receive an email confirmation of the names list being sent to our travel partners at UniGlobe Premier Travel, who will then issue the tickets.

Your exchange has been made possible through Experiences Canada's Youth Exchange Program which is generously funded by the Department of Canadian Heritage. Every year, thousands of youths and chaperones from across the country take part in an exchange through this program. It is important to create awareness and support for the program to ensure its long-term sustainability and funding. As such, we encourage participants to write to their local officials to share with them the experience and benefits of an exchange. Please find a sample letter on the following page for a Member of Parliament.

We encourage exchange groups to engage with their local MPs acknowledging the federal government's role in providing these opportunities to youth across Canada. Please contact communications@experiencescanada.ca for any additional information, briefing information or guidance in setting up a meet-and-greet.

Sample Letter to Your MP

Mr./Mrs. _____ ; M.P.

My name is _____ and I am a member of your riding. I attend _____ school (or am a member of _____ group) and my school/youth group has recently been selected to go on an exchange to _____ with Experiences Canada (experiencescanada.ca).

I am writing to thank you and the federal government for this opportunity and let you know that I am very excited to take part in this program. We hope that our exchange will allow us to explore our Canadian history & heritage. My family is looking forward to hosting a young person from another province/territory for a week. We want to invite you to be a part of our celebrations the week of _____. Please join us and our twins. Exchanges really allow young people like me across Canada to get to know one another and learn new things about ourselves. I think it's important to our area and to people in the rest of Canada that we learn more about each other.

If you would like to contact me, I may be reached at (your address/phone number).

Sincerely,
(Your name)

Step 6: Post-Exchange Activities

After your exchange is completed, Experiences Canada will email organizers the URL links to the post survey questionnaires. Your feedback is important to the program as it provides invaluable comments to guide us in program development. Your participation in this short but important survey is much appreciated. An Exchanges Canada Certificate of Participation is administered online by the Department of Canadian Heritage. Parents are to email their request to exchanges-echanges@pch.gc.ca including full participant name, the address of the participant, name of the exchange, name of the organization (school / youth group) and name of who delivered the exchange (Experiences Canada).

3.0 - Guide for Leading a Successful Exchange

3.1 Info Session for Parents

As a Group Organizer, you are required to host an information session for parents, chaperones, and participants. During this session, the following points should be raised:

1. Establish clear expectations and deadlines for submission of all forms and payments.
2. Determine roles and responsibilities of youth participants, parents, and chaperones.
3. Determine who will follow up with overdue and outstanding forms and payments internally.
4. It should be stressed to youth participants and their families that the information submitted on their registration form should be as accurate as possible, as this information is used to find them to best match for their exchange.
5. Ensure that families understand that the information provided for the youth registration form must match the information reflected on their official I.D.

Ensure each hosting household and other adult volunteers understand that to host a participant, every adult 18 years and older is required to complete and submit a Criminal Record Check and Vulnerable Sector Check.

Please ensure that parents and guardians have all the necessary information concerning their child's exchange including travel itineraries, travel insurance forms, hosting itineraries, and emergency contact phone numbers.

3.2 Twinning Youth

The following considerations are a helpful tool for the twinning process. This, combined with the detailed information found on the Youth Registration Form, will help you ensure the best matches possible.

Twinning Considerations:

- Use the Participant Registration Form as a general guide.
- Group Organizers should develop criteria together and a plan to facilitate good matches.
- Start with youth who have allergies, medical concerns, and / or special needs.
- Matches based on shared interests or hobbies are often very successful.
- Youth typically prefer to be twinned with a participant of the same gender.
- It is important to keep age and grade levels in mind.

- Develop a contingency plan in case a hosting arrangement does not work out.
- Encourage communication between twins and set up activities with the twin group that will promote communication before the exchange.
- Youth should understand that they are responsible for making their twin feel at home.

If a group twins participants of different sexes, it is important to ensure that:

- Suitable accommodations are available: males and females may not share the same room.
- Both youths are informed and agree to the twinning.
- The parents of both participants are informed and agree to the twinning.

Twinning with a Participant that Cannot Host
In a situation where a youth participant is twinned with someone who cannot host, the Group Organizer can either have the participant:

- Stay with a family that is already hosting and is willing and able to accept a second participant, or;
- Find another suitable family in the community that is willing to host.

In both cases, it is important to find ways for the originally twinned youth to connect outside of the daily activities so they have the same opportunity as the rest of the group to develop friendships.

If several families cannot host, alternate arrangements could be considered including using a school gym, youth hostels, community center, etc. Contact your Experiences Canada representative to discuss alternatives.

Emergency Host Families
It is advisable to have an extra family or two ready and screened, able to accommodate a youth with little or no notice should there be a need to remove a participant from their original host family.

Chaperone and Group Organizer Accommodations
Chaperones and Group Organizers are expected to host each other. It is important that this be clearly understood by both groups.

3.3 Host Family Screening

It is the responsibility of the Group Organizer or their delegate (i.e. a host screening committee) to select all hosting families and to ensure that all hosting families are appropriately screened and all documentation is duly completed and returned to Experiences Canada.

The Group Organizer is responsible for ensuring all youth participants are safe, comfortable, and properly cared for during their homestay experience. In addition, Group Organizers are required to follow, complete, and implement all safety policies and practices developed by Experiences Canada.

The reciprocal homestay aspect is an integral part of Experiences Canada exchanges and fundamental to the experiential learning process. Staying with a local family from the host community provides youth with the opportunity to immerse themselves in the culture of the local community, improve their understanding and knowledge of Canada, and develop and appreciation for diversity while connecting with their twin.

The benefits of a positive billeting experience are tremendous, while a negative host family experience can be less than satisfying and has the potential to affect the entire exchange experience. It is mandatory that every potential host family complete Experiences Canada's screening process to help ensure that the youth participant will be safe, comfortable, and properly cared for during their exchange.

This screening must be completed prior to the finalization of travel arrangements and the purchase of tickets.

Host Family screening documentation is highly personal and confidential in nature. For these reasons, it must be stored in a secure location where access is limited to the Group Organizer and / or the Principal or Director of the organization. Any information regarding hosting, youth registrations, or references will be stored on your secured Group Organizer Portal.

Step 1 of the Screening Process
Every family who wishes to host must complete a Host Family Application and two Host Family Reference forms. This is all done electronically and can be filled out during their Youth Registration if they are opting to host. All references are emailed online forms to complete, which then attach to the host application in the Group Organizer portal.

- Family members may not act as references.
- The reference needs to have known the family for a minimum of 1 year and have been in contact with the family within the last 6 months.
- All requested fields of information must be completed.
- The reference must be 21 years or older.

Note: Host References are to be reviewed and/or contacted by the Group Organizer. Host References are not reviewed or contacted by Experiences Canada.

Step 2 of the Screening Process
The Group Organizer verifies that the Application is complete has accepted or refused the Host Family. In the case of refusal, applicants will be notified; however, no reasons need to be given, and all decisions will be considered final. A sample refusal letter is provided on the following page as a template.

To double-check before approving a host family:

- Each prospective host family has duly completed and submitted a Host Application form.
- All questions on both the Application and Reference forms have been answered.
- The contact information for both references is complete.
- The Group Organizer has verified the Host Family Reference Check forms.



Sample Letter of Refusal of a Host Family

ON SCHOOL/ORGANIZATION LETTERHEAD

Date
Group Organizer
School / Association
Address
Subject: Host Family Screening

Dear (NAME),
Thank you for your application to be a host family. Experiences Canada provides criteria for the mandatory screening of families wishing to host and these elements are used to review all applications.

We regret to inform you that you have not been selected to be a host family on this occasion.

Please note however that this does not affect your child's opportunity to participate in the exchange. Your child may participate fully and be twinned with another youth from the twin group.

We also encourage you to participate in other aspects of the exchange such as planning and participating in hosting activities.

Thank you for your understanding and for your contributions toward making this a positive opportunity for your child!

Sincerely,
(GROUP LEADER NAME)

3.4 Mandatory Police Check and Vulnerable Sector Check

All volunteers and adults 18 years of age and over living in the host family household are required to provide a clear police record and vulnerable sector checks. The police record checks are in addition to the existing screening process outlined above. These mandatory police and vulnerable sector checks are to be submitted to Experiences Canada via the GO Portal.

Note that volunteers and adults 18 years of age and older who are living in the host family household who present a criminal record check that includes a conviction for a minor marijuana possession charge will be permitted to host a youth.

This amendment in the Host Family screening policy & procedures does not apply to any other drug related convictions outside of the bounds of those the federal government plans to pardon. Apart from this exception, all criminal records and vulnerable sector checks must be clear of any convictions.

Experiences Canada can provide a letter entitled “Volunteer Letter for Police Check and Vulnerable Sector Check” that, in some cases, may prompt the police detachment processing the checks to waive their processing fee, if applicable. This is not guaranteed as the verification process is different in each community. Please contact Experiences Canada staff if this letter is required.

3.5 Budget and Financial Report

Your budget is the backbone of the success of your exchange. To help you best prepare for your exchange, you are required to submit a draft budget for your exchange which lists the expected sources, projected amounts of revenues to raise, and forecasted expenses of your group’s participation in the Experiences Canada exchange program. This form is available in your Group Organizer portal.

This is intended as a draft budget. Your final financial and non-monetary report will be required at the end of your exchange, when both halves of the project are completed. This form is also available in your Group Organizer portal.

3.6 Special Measures Funding

Experiences Canada strongly believes that all youth should have equal access to participation in our exchanges program. As such, we provide limited funding to support the inclusion of marginalized youth (see definitions below) on a case-by-case basis. If you are seeking Special Measures funding, you must complete an application form and submit it to Experiences Canada for review. As funding is limited, we regret that we cannot accommodate all requests. Before applying for Special Measures funding, we recommend that you consult with your Experiences Canada Coordinator for additional

help and to ensure that your request meets the requirements.

The following are definitions from the Department of Canadian Heritage.

- *Indigenous* - A person who belongs to one of the three Indigenous Peoples in Canada, namely, First Nations, Inuit (Inuk) or Métis.
- *Rural* - Rural population includes all population living in rural areas of census metropolitan areas (CMAs) and census agglomerations (CAs), as well as population living in rural areas outside CMAs and CAs.
- *Person with a Disability* - A person with a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, sensory, learning or communication impairment, or a functional limitation, whether apparent or not, and permanent, temporary or episodic in nature, that hinders their full and equal participation in society when they face a barrier.
- *Member of a Racialized Group* - A group of people categorized according to ethnic or racial characteristics and subjected to discrimination on that basis. The terms "racialized group" and "racialized minority" are often used as synonyms of "members of visible minorities" in the meaning of the Employment Equity Act. However, the concept of "racialized group" encompasses more than what is defined in the Act.
- *Visible Minority* - A person, other than an Indigenous person, who is non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour.
- *Low Income Household* - Statistics Canada has cited a low-income cut-off level of $46,362 for a family of 4. ECP believes the Recipient delivery organization is best positioned to make the judgement as to whether certain of its participants may come from a low-income family.

To apply, please complete Special Measures Application form. Your application should include the following:

- What is the nature of your request, including the reason for additional funding?
- How much funding is being requested?
- How much is the group contributing towards the costs?
- Your draft budget clearly showing a shortfall in funding (Note: budgets that show a surplus will not be eligible for additional funding).

The Special Measures form, as well as instructions on filling out the Special Measures request, are both available in your Group Organizer portal. Please read the instructions carefully. If you have any questions, reach out to your Experiences Canada coordinator.

3.7 Exchange Learning Plan

The Exchange Learning Plan helps Group Organizers plan a quality program for the youth participants and ensure that safety and risk management considerations are addressed. It helps ensure that each Group Organizer has a clear understanding of the objectives of the program and that the activities being organized are inclusive, safe, and well-balanced.

The Group Organizer, the youth, and other interested parties are responsible for planning and adhering to the requested Learning Objectives for the group they are hosting while in their home community. The Group Organizer is encouraged to seek regular input from his or her twin Group Organizer to ensure both groups' learning objectives are met.

You will receive a link to your Exchange Learning Plan form by email when you are notified of your twinning. Please complete the form, indicating your learning objectives for your group.

Youth engagement is an inherent part of Experiences Canada's exchange model. You will be asked to describe the youth-led aspects of your exchange, such as how youth will make decisions, adopt leadership roles, and take a proactive role in the program. Having youth involved in completing the Exchange Learning Plan is an excellent way of empowering them and encouraging a high level of commitment. Additionally, the youth will gain valuable planning and organizational skills.

Community Engagement: If you are doing an exchange activity that involves participants having a positive impact on their community, please provide a brief description of the project you will undertake.

3.8 Hosting Activity Plans

The Hosting Activities Plan describes in detail the group's actual planned activities while hosting their guests.

It is strongly recommended that you discuss your proposed itinerary with your twin Group Organizer in advance and that all risk management considerations are addressed.

Your final Hosting Activity Plan must be submitted at least 30 days prior to hosting. A minimum of 30% of your activities must include Canadian history and heritage content.

Your hosting itinerary should be consistent with your Exchanges Learning Plan. All hosting plans will be reviewed by your Experiences Canada representative. If any changes are required, Experiences Canada will contact you.

Should your Hosting Activities Plan and/or activities change, please notify your Experiences Canada representative as soon as possible.

Please note that the cost of local activities is not covered by Experiences Canada. As such, Group Organizers are required to prepare a budget and fundraise accordingly.

It is essential that both groups participate in all activities together in both communities.

Tips for developing the itinerary:

- It is a good idea to have at least one physical activity per day and at least one group activity for all the participants and the host families.
- Youth participants should be involved in planning and selection of activities.
- Have a plan B ready to replace any weather-dependent activities.
- Allocate sufficient time for youth to interact with host families as well as travel time between activities.
- For longer programs, it is a good idea to have a scheduled “Family Day” so everyone has a chance to rest.

Please ONLY use the provided Hosting Activity Plan document when submitting to your Experiences Canada representative.

3.9 Travel

For all travel coordination, Experiences Canada uses its preferred travel agency, Uniglobe Travel Group, to book air carriers and coach lines. All travel is coordinated by Experiences Canada.

Airline regulations require that the names of the participants must be the same on the travel documents as they appear on legal documents. Please check with your airline regarding policies for carry-on items, as well as the required time of arrival at the airport for check-in. With groups, we recommend arriving at least 90 minutes prior to your scheduled departure. If traveling by bus, please confirm the reservations 24 hours prior to travel.

Please note that all local transportation to and from activities is the responsibility and at the cost of the groups. Ensure that your Experiences Canada representative has your contact information including a mobile phone number where you can be always reached while on exchange. Please note that the travel agent cannot make changes to the travel documents without prior approval from Experiences Canada. Travel alterations / deviations are not permitted. All participants and chaperones must travel as a group for the duration of the program.

Travel expenses funded by Canadian Heritage are for **subsidized participants only.** Unsubsidized participants (youth or chaperones) who participate in an exchange are not entitled to Heritage Canada funding. Only subsidized youth and chaperones qualify for travel funding.

Airfare
The airfare of unsubsidized participants must be paid by the unsubsidized person / family. Once the participant information is passed to Uniglobe for travel booking and fees, Uniglobe will call the unsubsidized chaperone or parent to discuss billing and payment.

Hotel
Any hotel costs for unsubsidized participants must be paid by the unsubsidized youth or chaperone. However, if a youth is unsubsidized and the GO determines that the youth can bunk in the same bed / room as other youth, whose parents approve, then they wouldn't need to pay for their own room. The GO usually provides a list of names by room and the kids double up.

If an adult is unsubsidized, unless the GO or one of the chaperones wants a roommate, they would have to pay for their own hotel room. Uniglobe will need to be notified which rooms are unsubsidized so that the person or parent can be billed directly, the same as the airfare.

Bus
Unsubsidized participants (youth and chaperones) are included in the exchange group and therefore the bus is generally chosen for the total group size. There would be no need to charge a bus fee to unsubsidized participants for this type of travel.

3.10 Risk Management

The safety and security of participants is our number one priority. Identifying potential risks will help you prepare should risk scenarios arise. Your Experiences Canada representative will be in touch should any of your activities conflict with Experiences Canada's safety policy.

3.11 Safety and Security

All youth participants have the right to feel safe. In particular, youth should feel safe and secure at all times while staying with their host families and have the right to request to be moved if safety is a concern.

It is important that Group Organizers discuss with one another things such as:

- Safety plans
- What constitutes safety?
- Difference in safety practices (i.e. does your twin live in a community with regular bear sightings? Does your twin live in a major city where youth shouldn't be out late?)

All youth participants must have appropriate adult supervision while staying with a host family. The Group Organizer must screen all potential host families (refer to the Host Family Screening section of this document). All youth must adhere to the Code of Conduct established for the exchange. Group Organizers, in coordination with their organization and their twin, will work together to determine the most appropriate course of action should a participant not follow the Code of Conduct.

Group Organizers and all participants should have an emergency contact card on them at all times.

3.12 How to Create a Media Release

News releases are an effective way to communicate the benefits of an exchange with a broader audience. Your news release should be concise and highlight the exchange or a newsworthy activity during your exchange.

The release should clearly mention the financial support provided by Experiences Canada through Youth Exchanges Canada and the Department of Canadian Heritage. An easy way to obtain media coverage is to send a photo of the participants to your local newspaper and include a short explanation. Please ensure that all appropriate waivers are in place before sending photos featuring youth.

On the following page is a media release sample that can be used as a guideline for your release. Should you receive any coverage, please send it along to Experiences Canada in either electronic or paper format. Indicate the specific date when the article was published or interview was aired as well as the name of the publication/program. Please contact communications@experiencescanada.ca for additional information / guidelines.

SAMPLE MEDIA RELEASE
(ADD LOGOS FROM THE 2 GROUPS IF APPLICAPLE)

Welcoming visitors from (City)

(Your town)
(Today's date)

On _____, the (name of your group) will be welcoming a group of _____ people from _____ to participate in a _-day youth exchange.

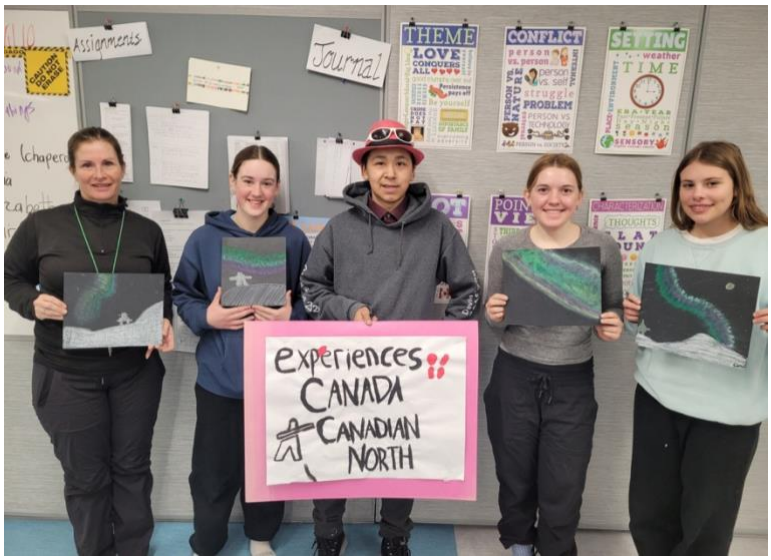
"This is a wonderful opportunity for our youth to experience Canada's diversity," said Ms./Mr. _____, Principal / Group Organizer of the (local school / group name).

"A carefully planned activity program has been developed to showcase our community's landmarks and achievements and to learn more about our visitor's community," continued Ms./Mr. _____.

The two groups have been twinned under a project funded by Experiences Canada through the Youth Exchange program. Generously funded by the Department of Canadian Heritage, the program is available to youth groups between the ages of 12-17 from all provinces and territories across Canada.

"We are thankful for this community's generous input and sponsorship. This is a clear example of a successful community partnership where families, businesses and school organizations have joined forces to encourage personal growth, community pride and a greater understanding of our Canadian heritage," concluded Ms./Mr. _____.

For more information, contact: (Group Organizer Name) (Title)



4.0 - Insurance

There are three types of insurance we want to discuss so that the Group Organizers better understand the purpose of each and when they get triggered.

4.1 Exchange Group - Provide Proof of Insurance for Commercial General Liability

The purpose of this insurance is if any group participant causes harm or injury to third party property or persons during the exchange trip, your sponsor insurance will be liable. The Group Organizer will provide Experiences Canada a certificate of insurance for Commercial General Liability from their Sponsor organization based on the following:

- Generally, this is for community type groups or sports associations. Schools are generally insured by default and therefore not required to provide proof of insurance.
- Whether you are a community group, sports association, or other, you must submit to Experiences Canada an insurance certificate with a minimum of $2 million coverage for Commercial General Liability.
- Example: If a participant skier injures a member of the public while skiing down the hill and that person must go to the hospital for medical treatment, you would look to your sponsor insurance program for any legal liability.
- Example: If a hockey exchange group damages property at a sportsplex, you would notify your sponsor insurance program for any legal liability.

4.2 Experiences Canada's Personal Accident Insurance for Exchange Participants

If any exchange participant has an accident (i.e. falls down the stairs and breaks their leg during the exchange trip) and has to seek medical attention, there is a three-step process to determine the sequence of liability.

Sequence of liability with insurance plans:

1. For all in-country travel, have the student's parents check in with the student's home provinces health plan to access available coverage.
2. The participant's parents or guardians will check with their private health insurance to access any available coverage through their plan.
3. If neither of the above apply and/or are declined, then Experiences Canada's accident insurance will then apply.

Note:
Experiences Canada's Group Accident Insurance Plan **does not provide coverage** for the following circumstances:

- Trip cancellation
- Lost baggage
- Stolen or missing items
- Illness or pre-existing medical conditions
- Travel cancellation and/or interruption

Experiences Canada's coverage is minimal unless the injury or illness is critical or there is loss of life or limb. What we may cover under less critical circumstances is:

- Air travel for a parent or guardian to the injured participants location-up to $5,000.
- Emergency taxi benefit up to $50.
- Emergency transportation benefit (mileage) land or sea up to $250.

Your particular circumstances would be assessed by our insurance broker and would be based on the details of your particular situation. Please follow the steps below in dealing with an emergency.

Steps for Dealing with an Emergency Situation:

- In any situation where a member of the group gets sick or is injured, the first priority is always to seek medical attention.
- Please advise Experiences Canada at your first opportunity by calling the emergency phone line: 1-888-737-2410.
- Document the details of the emergency on the Accident / Incident Report Form. Send it ASAP to the Manager of Exchanges or your assigned coordinator. EC will contact the insurance broker to notify them of a potential claim.
- A new Claims Application form will be provided by Experiences Canada whereby you will document additional details of services rendered and their dates. Any costs incurred in seeking medical attention should be documented with original receipts and a medical report. All questions regarding insurance coverage and claims should be directed to the Manager of Exchanges or the Director of Finance unless the Insurance Broker needs to deal with the parent directly.

4.3 Additional Trip Insurance for Your Group or Individual Youth for the Week

The parent or guardian may purchase private travel insurance.

Experiences Canada recommends that individual participants secure travel, health, and medical insurance from family plans or other providers like the Blue Cross, CAA, Uniglobe, etc. Uniglobe asks the Group Organizer at time of reserving the flights whether the group would like to purchase travel insurance. This information should be discussed at parent meetings to ensure an informed decision is made.

Exchange travel is now servicing more trips to northern Canada (in many provinces and territories), which can be quite remote and with long distances between hospitals and available medical services. Accidents do happen through no one's fault; however, having appropriate insurance coverage as well as available funds for services required or to find access in remote regions would be considered prudent and strategically necessary.



5.0 - In Case of Emergency

The number one priority at all times during an exchange is the safety and security of all participants. All emergencies and/or incidents are to be dealt with in a timely, appropriate, and professional manner by the Group Organizer or another responsible adult in coordination with their organization. In any situation where a member of the group gets sick or is injured, the first priority is always to seek medical attention. As indicated above, any costs incurred in seeking medical attention should be documented with receipts and a medical report. Please see section 4.0 above for any further details regarding Insurance.

In case of an accident or incident, you must advise Experiences Canada at your first opportunity by calling the emergency phone line (1-888-737-2410) and submitting an Experiences Canada Accident / Incident Report Form within 24 hours. The Accident / Incident Report Form is available on your Group Organizer Portal. The Group Organizer should carry blank accident / incident forms with a First Aid Kit throughout the exchange.

In case of an instance of alleged harassment or abuse, the Group Organizer must call Experiences Canada immediately and complete an Accident / Incident Report Form within 24 hours.



6.0 - Directory of Forms

This final section provides Group Organizers with a list of forms to be completed by youth participants, parents, and chaperones, as well as additional tools and resources. All are available either on the Group Organizer Portal or by email from your coordinator. Parents and guardians also have access to a selection of forms.

It is important that you prepare yourself by reading through these forms to understand what each form requires as you progress through your exchange.

At the first information meeting, inform parents / hosts of the necessary forms and identify clear deadlines with Parents and Participants for when they are to be completed. Some forms are then sent digitally to Experiences Canada with signatures, while other forms are to be securely kept by the Group Organizer.

Step	***Form***	***Description***	***Where to Find It***
Step 1	Application form Acknowledgment of Group Organizer	Initial application to the program. A formal acknowledgment of your acceptance to your role as Group Organizer.	Online at www.experiencescanada.ca Automatically emailed to you after registration.
Step 3	Participant Agreement, Travel Dates, and Youth Numbers	The official submission of your verified travel dates and youth numbers after being twinned, and your contractual agreement of the exchange with Experiences Canada.	Sent to you by Experiences Canada once you have accepted your twinning.
Step 4	Parent Contact Form	The form that Group Organizers fill out with parent / guardian contact info to send them the Youth Registration form digitally.	Emailed to the GO automatically. Also available in the GO Portal.
Step 4	Youth Registration Form	The registration of youth participants, including personal info, hosting application, and details on youth (allergies, personality, emergency contacts, etc.)	Emailed to parents/guardians automatically once GO submits the Parent Contact Form. Also available in the GO Portal.

Step 4	Common Stay Request Letter	The formal request to Experiences Canada to host via Common Stay (see Common Stay definition), including breakdown of where the youth will stay to ensure it meets standards.	Available in the GO Portal.
Step 4	Host Application	The form any parents / guardians must fill out to ensure they are eligible to host.	Part of the Youth Registration Form.
Step 4	Host Reference Form	The form filled out by references given by parents/guardians looking to host youth during the exchange.	Part of the Youth Registration Form.
Step 4	Chaperone Registration Form	Registration for any chaperones participating in the exchange.	Emailed to chaperones by GO. Link is sent to GO in the exchange confirmation email. Also available in the GO Portal.
Step 4	Exchange Learning Plan	A breakdown of the goals of the exchange, and how the group will set out to achieve them.	Emailed automatically to the GO. Also available in the GO Portal.
Step 4	Statement of Group Organizer	Official acknowledgement by the Group Organizer that they have fulfilled their duties for planning, documenting, communicating, and preparing the exchange, while agreeing to their responsibilities during travel.	Emailed manually to the GO by their exchange coordinator once all youth and chaperones have completed their registrations.
Step 5	Application to Special Measures	See Instructions for Special Measures.	Available in the GO Portal.
	Accident / Incident Report	Official documentation of accidents / incidents that occur during the exchange.	Available in the GO Portal.