
Guide for Promoting Group Study Exchange

Rotary Foundation's new vision creates new publication relations opportunities

Since 1965, the Group Study Exchange (GSE) program has provided inspiring vocational, educational, and cultural experiences for more than 70,000 men and women. Recently, districts have been exploring innovative ideas to expand the scope and focus of GSE. Recognizing the benefits of these ideas, The Rotary Foundation Trustees agreed in 2008 to update the Foundation's mission and encourage all districts to align their activities with the Foundation's new areas of focus. These six areas are maternal and child health, water and sanitation, disease prevention and treatment, basic education and literacy, economic and community development, and peace and conflict prevention/resolution.

Build PR into the planning process

New approaches to GSE can generate new approaches to promoting the program. Incorporate public relations into the earliest GSE planning stages. Teams involved in activities relevant to the larger community achieve the greatest PR success. Districts now have the flexibility to design teams that best address local needs. The following categories of GSEs present exciting possibilities for increasing the program's sustainability, newsworthiness, and visibility.

- **Area of Focus GSEs:** Teams can be composed of participants with vocations related to one or more area of focus. Districts should research the strengths and needs of their community. If a strength is found that relates to an area of focus, districts can recruit professionals from the community who can share their expertise with their counterparts in the partner district. Similarly, if a need is found that relates to an area of focus, teams of professionals that want to learn can visit their counterparts and bring back the knowledge to make improvements in their community.
- **Single-Vocation GSEs:** Teams composed of participants in one specialized vocation have a unique opportunity to enrich the communities they visit, as well as to expand their professional horizons. Single-vocation teams can be organized for professional information-sharing (e.g., teams of physicians, educators, agriculturists, engineers, etc.).
- **Cultural GSEs:** Where better for a dancer to practice his or her art than at a performance of the Bolshoi Ballet in Russia, or for a playwright to be inspired than at the Globe Theatre in England? The purpose of a cultural exchange is for artists, writers, musicians, linguists, or museum curators to share their talents and interests through a GSE that focuses on the more creative aspects of an area. Vocational days may be spent observing yoga classes in India, learning to dance the tango in Argentina, or conducting a New York Philharmonic rehearsal session.
- **Neighboring Country GSEs:** Whether they have had centuries-long conflicts or mutual friendships, countries that border each other have always presented an opportunity for exchange. A Neighboring Country GSE is an exchange between any two districts located in countries that have a common border or exist in close proximity. In multicountry districts, a Neighboring Country GSE must be based on travel between localities that have a common country border or exist in close proximity.

- **GSEs in Non-Rotary Countries:** The media is often interested in new developments or “firsts.” Exchanges usually occur between teams from Rotary countries. In recent years, several exchanges have taken place with non-Rotary countries, such as Vietnam. A GSE is often a precursor to Rotary expansion into a new area. Because Rotary is a foreign concept in these areas, a GSE is often of interest to the media and the community. And visitors from the non-Rotary country may be rare.
- **Humanitarian GSEs:** A number of GSE teams have found the perfect way to build upon the friendships developed during their exchanges — searching out humanitarian needs in the host district and returning home with a Foundation grant proposal. A GSE between District 6290 (part of Ontario, Canada, and of Michigan, USA) and District 2440 (Turkey) created strong bonds. The two districts remained in contact and later partnered to obtain a Rotary Foundation Matching Grant. Strong support and contributions from both districts and the Foundation helped secure a mammography machine for women in Turkey without financial support. District 2440 leaders estimate that this machine will screen 50,000 women over a period of 10 years.

Attracting GSE participants

The GSE program is only as good as its participants. To attract a large pool of qualified applicants, promote the availability of a GSE to several audiences in your community.

- **Alert the media.** Send a news release announcing application availability to local newspapers, magazines, and television and radio stations (see sample). District 5170 (California, USA) developed 30- and 60-second radio public service announcements inviting candidates to apply for a GSE to Central America. Several local stations broadcast the PSAs, which helped attract applicants (see sample).
- **Create an eye-catching ad.** Rotarians can often purchase advertising space in a local newspaper or magazine for a discounted price. Work with a local graphic designer or the newspaper’s advertising department. Be creative in your design. Ads should at least include a brief headline and a few lines of text explaining the purpose and destination of the GSE, time frame, type of applicants sought, application deadlines, and a contact name, phone and fax numbers, and an e-mail address for readers to obtain more information.
- **Target local employers.** Some potential applicants may be concerned about an extended leave (up to six weeks) from their job. It is important that local employers recognize the business benefits of GSE and support the program. Send information about an upcoming exchange, GSE brochures, and applications to human resources managers at local companies to make available to employees. In larger corporations, Rotarians may want to meet with a human resources representative to find the best way to share information with eligible employees. You may also want to display GSE materials in the public library or other municipal offices, including on their websites.
- **Use social networking tools.** Rotarians can embrace social networks as a means to connect with young professionals and promote the GSE program. Rotary has an official Facebook page, Twitter page, LinkedIn group, and its own YouTube channel. In addition, many GSE participants have created blogs about their experience that you can refer to in your advertising.
- **Use the Rotary network.** Many GSE participants find out about the program by talking to friends, colleagues, or Rotarians who participated in an exchange. Inform Rotary clubs in your district about the upcoming GSE and ask Rotarians to provide information to co-workers or friends who are potential candidates. Alumni are another resource. Inform them of upcoming GSEs, and ask alumni in your area to talk to others about their experiences and the benefits of participating.

Each district is encouraged to develop and maintain a database of Foundation alumni. For assistance, contact The Rotary Foundation Alumni Relations section at RI World Headquarters.

Working with the media

The media looks for stories that are interesting, visual, timely, and relevant. A visiting team's international perspective on your community can be an interesting news or human interest story. Look for PR opportunities beyond simply sending out a release announcing application availability. When contacting a reporter about a visiting team, include a copy of their itinerary and a local contact name, phone and fax numbers, and e-mail address. Also provide brief biographical sketches of team members. Information should be provided to the media at least one week before a team's arrival.

Provide photos

One way to improve the chances of receiving coverage is to provide interesting visuals to local newspapers or point out video opportunities for television news programs. If a local newspaper is unable to send out a photographer, take your own photos — or hire a professional photographer — and send them to the media. A high-quality, visually compelling photo has a good chance of being used.

Include captions with photos, describing the scene and naming everyone pictured.

When taking a photo, be imaginative. Groups of people staring at a camera are generally not exciting. Take pictures that show action or tell a story and convey the purpose of GSE, such as

- Hands-on photos — team members working with other professionals in the community
- A depiction of two different cultures coming together
- GSE members giving presentations
- A GSE team working with local Rotarians on a service project or with children
- Inclusion whenever possible of the Rotary emblem — either on a sign or an article of clothing

Share GSE photos with Rotary International for use in publications and displays.

Prepare team members

GSE participants and alumni are the program's best spokespeople. While on an exchange, team members should be prepared to talk about Rotary and their home country. Provide team members with general Rotary information and educate them about their sponsor district's service initiatives. At the team members' orientation, you may want to hold mock press interviews to prepare them for possible questions. Before they leave, team members should be able to

- Present a short talk about their country appropriate for a Rotary club or other groups
- Respond effectively to questions from the media and public
- Talk knowledgeably about Rotary programs and activities

Show results

Some of the best PR opportunities occur after the exchange is over. Chris Orr, a 1989 visually impaired GSE team member from New Zealand to Sweden, formed a long-lasting relationship with Rotary that has led to several projects for the blind. Working with Orr, who is now a guide-dog trainer for the Royal New Zealand Foundation for the Blind, the Rotary Club of Newmarket, Auckland, funded a production studio for a talking-book library.

Several exchanges have resulted in a new Rotary Foundation Matching Grant or a joint service project between sponsoring and hosting districts. Team members also return with innovative ideas that can improve their job performance. By showing the results of a GSE, you can illustrate the lasting impact of an exchange and provide human interest stories for the local media.

Crisis!

A team member is injured or robbed on an exchange. A participant contacts a reporter about an unpleasant exchange experience. Despite your best efforts, situations do arise that require sensitive handling. When contacted by a reporter about a potentially negative story, the best thing to do is be straightforward — don't hide. If you can't answer a question immediately, take some time to seek advice before making a statement. After a problem is resolved, contact the reporter and describe what was done to correct the situation.

Alert your district governor and GSE staff at RI World Headquarters to any potentially negative publicity.

PR resources

Several publications and materials available from Rotary International can help promote the GSE program. Order materials at www.shop.rotary.org, or from RI Publications Order Services (phone: 847-866-4600; fax: 847-866-3276; shop.rotary@rotary.org) or your international office.

- **Group Study Exchange Brochure** (160) Basic information about the GSE program. Can be sent to the media or employers, displayed in high-traffic areas, or provided to community members interested in the program.
- **This Is Rotary** (001) This brochure is a must-have for every club. The colorful, illustrated booklet provides a brief overview of Rotary for the general public, prospective members, and beneficiaries of Rotary service, and is a good PR tool for use when attending non-Rotary events.
- **What's Rotary?** (419) This handy wallet-size card provides a quick overview of Rotary and its work. Popular as a handout to non-Rotarians.
- **The Rotary Fact Pack** (web only) This set of seven fact sheets can help in preparing news releases and promotional materials to share the good work of Rotary.
- **Effective Public Relations: A Guide for Rotary Clubs** (257) This “how-to” guide is a great way to get started with PR efforts. It is a basic handbook of tips and guidelines to help you promote club activities and get familiar with the PR tools of the trade.
- **Rotary PR Tips** (web only) An electronic newsletter for clubs and districts seeking ways to share Rotary in their community. This resource is sent twice monthly and offers innovative outreach ideas, including strategies for relating Rotary to news trends. Subscribe at www.rotary.org, or e-mail pr@rotary.org.
- **This Is Rotary DVD** (449) A compilation of stories about what Rotary is and does around the world. This resource can help you share Rotary in many ways, whether by serving as an inspirational club program, an introduction to the organization for prospective members, or a means of inspiring public service in your community. Rotarians are also encouraged to ask community access television stations if they would air all or part of the DVD, which can be broadcast as one 27-minute program or as individual segments.
- **Humanity in Motion V** (607) The next phase of Rotary's global public image campaign, this four-disc set of PSAs for television, radio, print, Internet, and outdoor media (such as billboards) provides materials to support membership outreach and Rotary's End Polio Now campaign. The PSAs can also be downloaded at www.rotary.org/humanityinmotion.
- **GSE Employer Brochure** (304) Available online and for order.

For more information . . .

about promoting The Rotary Foundation's Group Study Exchange program, contact the RI Public Relations division at 847-866-3237 (phone); 847-866-8237 (fax); or via e-mail at publicrelations@rotary.org.

Sample news release: Seeking Group Study Exchange team members

(Insert contact information here)

Rotary club seeks area professionals for goodwill exchange to (country)

(City), (State/Province), (Date) — Rotarians of (area — may be district, club, or description of geographical area) are seeking four outstanding professionals to visit (country) in (month, year) as part of the Group Study Exchange program of The Rotary Foundation.

Through the program, teams of professionals exchange visits between paired areas in different countries. The awards involve four- to six-week visits, during which team members share personal knowledge of their own country and experience the customs, vocations, and lifestyles of another.

The purpose of a Group Study Exchange is to promote international understanding and goodwill through person-to-person contact. While abroad, team members stay in Rotarians' homes and have the opportunity to meet their professional counterparts. They will also give presentations to Rotary clubs and other groups about their home country.

The Rotary Foundation provides a round-trip air ticket, and local Rotarians in the host country provide meals, lodging, and group travel in their district. Team members pay for personal and incidental expenses.

People interested in applying should be employed full-time in a recognized business or profession. Young professionals within the age range of 25 to 40 are encouraged to apply. Applicants must live or be employed in Rotary District (number — describe geographical area of district).

For an application, please contact (insert local contact information in this paragraph — name, address, business and home phone numbers, and e-mail address, as well as application deadline date).

Sample radio PSA: Seeking Group Study Exchange team members

TIP: When sending this suggested script to a radio station program director, include a letter explaining the announcement's purpose and the district's reason for distributing it. Also include background information, such as a brochure or fact sheet, about the GSE program.

Rotary Exchange Participants Sought — 30 seconds

ENTHUSIASTIC, INFORMED, AND ARTICULATE LOCAL PROFESSIONALS ARE NEEDED FOR A ROTARY-SPONSORED GOODWILL TOUR OF (COUNTRY) IN (MONTH). ROTARY'S GROUP STUDY EXCHANGE PROGRAM GIVES LOCAL RESIDENTS THE OPPORTUNITY TO FOSTER INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING THROUGH PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE DIPLOMACY. IN TEAMS OF FIVE, PARTICIPANTS WILL MEET THEIR PROFESSIONAL PEERS, STAY IN ROTARIANS' HOMES, AND EXPERIENCE THE PEOPLE AND CULTURE OF (HOST COUNTRY).

ESTABLISHED PROFESSIONALS BETWEEN THE AGES OF 25 AND 40 WHO WOULD LIKE TO REPRESENT THE (AREA) ABROAD ARE ENCOURAGED TO APPLY. CONTACT ROTARY AT (NUMBER) FOR APPLICATIONS AND INFORMATION.