

# YOUTH EXCHANGE HANDBOOK



ROTARY INTERNATIONAL®

This is the 2008 edition of the *Youth Exchange Handbook* (746-EN). The information in this publication is based on the RI Constitution and Bylaws and the Rotary Code of Policies. Changes to these documents by the Council on Legislation or the RI Board of Directors override policy as stated in this publication.

The *Youth Exchange Handbook* is designed to help club and district Youth Exchange chairs and committees plan and carry out student exchanges. It includes:

- Roles and responsibilities of clubs, districts, and program participants
- Detailed information on hosting and sending students
- Suggestions for promoting the program and recruiting participants
- Resources available from RI to support your Youth Exchange program

### **Statement of Conduct for Working with Youth**

Rotary International strives to create and maintain a safe environment for all youth who participate in Rotary activities. To the best of their ability, Rotarians, Rotarians' spouses and partners, and other volunteers must safeguard the children and young people they come into contact with and protect them from physical, sexual, and emotional abuse.



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# Introduction to Youth Exchange

Exposure to different cultures ranks as one of the most powerful ways to promote international understanding and peace. The Rotary Youth Exchange program provides thousands of young students with the opportunity to meet people from other countries and to experience new cultures, planting the seeds for a lifetime of international understanding.

The program offers numerous benefits to its young participants and their Rotarian hosts and mentors, as well as to the community at large. Through Youth Exchange, students learn firsthand about all aspects of life in another country. As their concept of the world expands, they mature and develop a deeper understanding of themselves. Immersion in another country's educational system enhances their academic and personal growth. Host clubs and families and the entire community are enriched by extended, friendly contact with someone from a different culture.

## History

Youth Exchange began during the 1920s as an effort between a handful of clubs in Europe. These European exchanges continued until World War II and resumed in 1946. The reciprocal long-term academic exchange grew in popularity during the 1950s and became the primary type of Rotary Youth Exchange. In 1972, the RI Board of Directors agreed to recommend Youth Exchange to clubs worldwide as a worthwhile international activity. Today, more than 8,000 Youth Exchange students travel abroad each year to live and study in about 80 countries.



## Types of Exchanges

Rotary Youth Exchange offers three types of exchange programs:

- **Long-term exchange.** These exchanges usually last one year, during which the student lives with more than one family in the host country and is required to attend school there. Long-term exchanges may be extended to include part or all of the holiday/vacation periods immediately before and after the academic year.
- **Short-term exchange.** These exchanges vary from several days to several weeks; they often take place when school is not in session and usually do not include an academic program. Short-term exchanges generally involve a homestay experience with a family in the host country, but they can also be organized as international youth camps or tours that bring together students from many countries.
- **New Generations exchange.** These specialized short-term exchanges last three to six weeks and are open to young people ages 18-25. This program may include a vocational element.

Flexibility in the Youth Exchange program allows it to be adapted to fit the needs of any student who qualifies. Short-term and New Generations exchanges especially vary widely from district to district. For this reason, most of the information in this handbook applies specifically to the long-term exchange program.

Individual district and multidistrict programs may develop their own program rules and guidelines, provided they are consistent with those set by the RI Board. This handbook should be read in conjunction with the materials developed locally for use in the district. Check with those responsible for your district's Youth Exchange program for specific local modifications, as well as the division of responsibilities for Rotarians involved in the program.



# Club and District Leadership Roles

As with any Rotary program, volunteer support ensures success. The Rotary Youth Exchange program is administered at the district level under the supervision of the district governor. Rotary clubs interested in sending or hosting students must coordinate their participation through the district-level program.



An effective Youth Exchange program relies on the dedication of Rotarians serving in leadership positions. These positions will vary from district to district and club to club, depending, in part, on the size of the program. Whatever their specific position, all involved should have a clear understanding of the division of responsibilities in your inbound and/or outbound program. The following provides a general description of roles and responsibilities for each position or activity.

## Multidistrict Youth Exchange Groups



Many districts have found it beneficial to establish multidistrict Youth Exchange groups, which allow for streamlining administrative duties and ease the burden placed on participating districts. Although each multidistrict group operates differently, many arrange training and orientation for students, process applications and visa paperwork, negotiate group buys for travel and insurance, and promote the program in a specific geographic area. You can find a list of all multidistrict Youth Exchange groups at [www.rotary.org](http://www.rotary.org). If your district is interested in joining an existing group or starting a new one, contact RI staff at [youthexchange@rotary.org](mailto:youthexchange@rotary.org) for more information.

## District Governor

District governors are responsible for the supervision and control of the Youth Exchange program and should be familiar with program guidelines and district certification requirements. The district governor carries out the following duties:

- Appoints a district Youth Exchange chair
- Oversees the appointment of a district Youth Exchange committee. Governors are encouraged not to change more than 50 percent of the Youth Exchange committee at any time in order to ensure continuity. Governors are also encouraged to place the governor-elect or governor-nominee on the Youth Exchange committee so he or she can become more familiar with the program.
- Supports and monitors club and district programs to ensure Youth Exchange activities are conducted appropriately
- Addresses problems when they arise and corresponds with counterparts in other districts on behalf of a club or district chair

### Delegating Responsibilities

Depending on the specific structure of your district's Youth Exchange program, some of these activities may be managed by a district youth protection officer or a multidistrict Youth Exchange group.



### **Length of Service**

Although the RI Board encourages a three-year limit on the length of service of any one chair, the special knowledge and experience required to administer the Youth Exchange program sometimes necessitates an extension to allow time to provide for a properly trained successor.

## **District Youth Exchange Chair and Committee**

The district chair coordinates and promotes Youth Exchange activities within the district and communicates with Rotary International, the district governor, and clubs. In consultation with the district governor, the chair appoints the district committee and defines specific responsibilities for each member. The size of the committee will vary, depending on the size of the district program. One member of the committee should be responsible for encouraging and helping people with disabilities to participate in exchanges.

If a district youth protection officer is not appointed, one member of the committee should be responsible for maintaining youth protection policies and procedures for the Youth Exchange program; this member should have experience in youth protection, social work, law enforcement, or a similar field.

### **Committee member responsibilities**

1. Work with Rotary clubs to
  - Train club Youth Exchange committees
  - Establish expectations for inbound and outbound students
  - Provide information on Rotary resources to help strengthen clubs' Youth Exchange activities
  - Encourage clubs to involve alumni in all aspects of the program and organize ROTEX activities
2. Coordinate the following youth protection efforts within the Youth Exchange program:
  - Train host families, students, and adult volunteers.
  - Screen all adult volunteers, including, but not limited to, committee members, host families, Rotarian counselors, and others. This includes interviewing volunteers to determine their suitability for working with youth, ensuring that volunteers complete the Youth Volunteer Agreement, and conducting background checks, including references and law enforcement public records.
  - Ensure that any volunteer who has admitted to, been convicted of, or otherwise found to have engaged in sexual abuse or harassment is prohibited from working with youth in a Rotary context.
  - Develop a support system for students that meets all requirements for district certification.
  - Establish procedures for supporting students after an allegation of abuse or harassment, including removing alleged offenders from contact with youth in Rotary programs, determining criteria for moving a student, finding temporary housing, and providing support services.

3. Manage the following outbound activities:
  - Establish international contacts and communicate with them to place students.
  - Help clubs select students.
  - Provide student and parent orientation.
  - Coordinate all travel and visa arrangements for students (unless managed by a multidistrict group on behalf of the district).
  - Serve as liaison between students, parents, and travel agency to ensure that itineraries for exchange are established.
  - Review reports received from students abroad and take action to respond to any irregularities reported.
4. Manage the following inbound activities:
  - Serve as liaison between the district's host Rotary clubs and the students' home districts.
  - Coordinate all travel and visa arrangements for students (unless managed by a multidistrict group on behalf of the district).
  - Coordinate orientation for students upon arrival.
  - Assist clubs in selection and orientation of host families.
  - Meet arriving students at local airports and coordinate departure flights.
5. Implement risk management policies and put a crisis management plan in place:
  - Develop procedures for reporting and handling incidents, such as early returns and allegations of abuse or harassment, and inform all adult volunteers about the district's allegation response reporting guidelines.
  - Establish guidelines for the removal of students, adult volunteers, and any other participants who do not comply with program requirements. Any adult involved in a Rotary youth program against whom an allegation of sexual abuse or harassment is made must be removed from all contact with youth in Rotary programs until the matter is resolved.



- Develop crisis management procedures for emergencies such as natural disasters and civil or political unrest.
  - Make sure back-up host families are available for emergency situations.
  - Set required insurance levels for inbound students and necessary liability insurance for the district program and coordinate coverage and carriers with hosting district. Assist outbound students in securing insurance.
6. Develop district program guidelines and rules for students that comply with RI policy.
  7. Promote the program through district and club Web sites, advertisements, and news stories throughout the district.
  8. Maintain effective lines of communication between all program participants, including students, host families, counselors, and club and district officers.
  9. Designate one person, usually the district chair, to make reports to RI on the following:
    - All serious incidents involving a student, such as accidents, deaths, early returns, crimes, etc., and allegations of abuse or harassment within 72 hours
    - Success stories, interesting exchange ideas, positive alumni experiences, and other activities of note for inclusion in Rotary publications and on the RI Web site
    - An annual program evaluation form
    - Data for each student at least one month prior to his or her arrival, using the guarantee form included in the Rotary Youth Exchange Program Application. New host family information must be sent to RI when students change host families.



In order to participate in the Youth Exchange program, a district must be certified by RI. The certification program supports student safety by establishing the following minimum requirements for youth protection and best practices in exchange program operation:

- Adoption of the Statement of Conduct for Working with Youth and development of a district abuse and harassment prevention or youth protection policy
- Establishment of the district Youth Exchange program as part of an incorporated entity or a similarly formal legal association/organization
- Purchase of adequate general liability insurance with coverage and limits appropriate for the district's location
- Prohibition on club-to-club exchanges organized outside of the district program

### **Liability**

Clubs and districts are strongly encouraged to consult legal counsel about liability issues before undertaking Youth Exchange activities. Youth Exchange programs in certified districts located entirely within the United States are covered under the U.S. Rotary Club and District General Liability Insurance Program.

The Youth Exchange certification program offers flexibility to districts that are unable to meet the requirements due to local laws or circumstances. In some cases, multidistrict Youth Exchange groups can help member districts meet some certification requirements. All resources for certification are available at [www.rotary.org](http://www.rotary.org).

## **Rotary Club**

While coordinated at the district level under the supervision of the district governor, the Youth Exchange program depends on the participation of Rotary clubs, Rotarians and their families, and others in the community to build an effective support system for sending and hosting students. All members should make an effort to participate in Youth Exchange activities, either as a member of the club Youth Exchange committee, a host parent, or a Rotarian counselor.

**Each participating club assumes the following responsibilities:**

- Coordinating club Youth Exchange activities with the district program and ensuring compliance with RI and district policies
- Attending district Youth Exchange meetings
- Establishing club expectations for students
- Ensuring that students attend mandatory functions, such as orientations or district conferences
- Receiving feedback from students for program modification
- Notifying district Youth Exchange chair of any student issues or concerns

### **For outbound students**

- Promoting the program to students in the community, distributing applications, and coordinating selection of students at club level
- Interviewing and selecting candidates for the exchange

- Assigning a Rotarian counselor for each student
- Maintaining contact with district outbound coordinator

#### For inbound students

- Establishing and maintaining contact with inbound students before they arrive
- Meeting students at airport or train station
- Serving as liaison between Rotary club and schools that students attend during long-term exchanges



- Assigning a Rotarian counselor for each student
- Interviewing and screening potential host families
- Maintaining contact with district inbound coordinator
- Arranging disbursement of monthly allowance for long-term exchange students
- Coordinating selection and orientation of host families and maintaining contact with host families throughout the student's exchange

These responsibilities are shared among the club president and the club Youth Exchange committee and chair as follows:

- The **club president** appoints the club Youth Exchange chair, who should be someone with previous Youth Exchange experience. The president also oversees the selection of the club committee and supports the club's Youth Exchange activities.
- The **club Youth Exchange chair** plans, implements, and supports all activities involving sending and hosting long-term and short-term exchange students.
- The **club Youth Exchange committee** provides support as directed by the chair. The size and scope of this committee will vary according to the size of the club and the extent of its involvement in the program.

## Rotarian Counselor



Serving as liaison between the student, Rotary club, host family, and community at large, the Rotarian counselor plays a crucial role in the success of the Youth Exchange program. The counselor serves as the student's primary Rotary contact, easing his or her transition into the country and the community through regular personal contact throughout the year.

The counselor should enjoy working with young people and be prepared to advocate on behalf of the student should any issues arise during the exchange. Members of a student's host family are not eligible. Also, if possible, the Rotarian counselor should not be a close friend or relative of other volunteers involved with a particular student (e.g., school principal or host family).

The counselor has the following additional responsibilities:

- Establishing contact with the student before departure or arrival, explaining the expectations of the club and the district and maintaining and documenting regular contact (at least once a month)
- Counseling the student in matters such as choosing classes, making friends, and participating in activities
- Helping the student adapt to the culture and language

- Working with the community and the student's school to ensure that the student is involved in positive activities and community life
- Informing the student about abuse and harassment prevention and creating a supportive atmosphere in which the student feels comfortable discussing any concerns
- Serving as an advocate for the student in any matter

The Rotarian counselor should be trained to respond to problems or concerns that may arise during the exchange, including allegations of abuse or harassment. Counselors should be assigned to every outbound and inbound student in all exchange programs. Outbound counselors prepare students for the exchange and maintain regular contact while the student is abroad.

## Rotary International

Youth Exchange programs are implemented by districts, with local Rotarians making all exchange arrangements. The RI Secretariat provides the following support to Rotarians involved in Youth Exchange:

- Forwarding inquiries from prospective exchange students to district chairs and club presidents
- Providing an updated list of district Youth Exchange chairs and multidistrict officers each quarter
- Facilitating communications between Youth Exchange chairs around the world
- Developing promotional materials for Rotarians to use and working to place stories on Youth Exchange in newspapers and other publications
- Working with other exchange organizations and regulatory bodies
- Helping RI's Youth Exchange Committee plan the annual meeting held in conjunction with the RI Convention



- Developing and distributing an annual report of Youth Exchange activities to district and multidistrict Youth Exchange chairs
- Administering the district certification program and monitoring compliance with RI's youth protection policy
- Helping districts and multidistricts respond to reports of abuse and harassment and other emergency situations within the Youth Exchange program

### Youth Exchange Officers Preconvention Meeting

The Youth Exchange Officers Preconvention Meeting is held immediately before the RI Convention and is part of the official convention program. Meeting content is designed for Youth Exchange officers at the club, district, and multidistrict levels, though registration is open to any convention attendee, including Youth Exchange students.

### Youth Exchange Committee

At the international level, the RI president appoints a Youth Exchange Committee to advise the Board on all aspects of the program and to develop content for the preconvention meeting. Rotarians may contact members of this committee for advice and feedback; see the *Official Directory* for contact information.





# Outbound: Sending a Youth Exchange Student

The process of sending a young person abroad as an exchange student begins long before the student departs and continues through the student's return home. Rotarians involved with an outbound program promote the program to recruit prospective students, select suitable candidates, place students, provide orientation for the students and their parents, correspond with students during their exchange, and help the students and their families adjust to life after the exchange.

## Promoting the Program to Recruit Students

Publicize Youth Exchange to a wide range of eligible young people to secure the best possible candidates for the program. Identify the best time to promote the program, based on your club or district's calendar for application, selection, and orientation.

Secondary schools are excellent places to recruit participants. Secure prior approval from the school administration to display the *Youth Exchange Poster* (751-EN) and request permission for a Rotarian to speak to interested students. Bring copies of the brochures *Making a World of Difference: Youth Exchange* (755-EN) and *Discover Your World: Short-Term Youth Exchange* (756-EN) when speaking to groups of students, parents, or teachers. Include contact information on the brochures so prospective students will know how to reach you. In the community, promote the program to religious institutions, youth groups, athletic clubs, and cultural groups. Provide program information to community volunteers who work with students with disabilities.

To reach a wider audience, send out news releases to local media, including school newspapers, or broadcast a public service announcement about your Youth Exchange program on a local radio or TV station. If your club or district is currently hosting exchange students, submit an article to the local newspaper that highlights interesting experiences. Set up a booth at a library, community center, shopping center, or other public place to answer questions about Youth Exchange and distribute literature and applications. Create a Web site for your Youth Exchange program with a link to [www.rotary.org](http://www.rotary.org) and your club or district site.



When promoting the program, stress the cultural and educational benefits of the exchange, as well as the unique qualities of the Rotary program. Arrange for a former or current Youth Exchange student to address the local parent-teacher association or a school assembly and personally recommend the program. When recruiting, don't forget about young people involved in Interact and RYLA in your district. And follow up on inquiries from interested students that RI sends to district chairs.

## Selecting Students

Ask an experienced Rotarian to respond to all inquiries from students and their parents. All interested students who meet the following basic requirements should be given the opportunity to apply to the program.

## Eligibility Requirements

Appropriate age at the time of the exchange, as follows:

-  • **Age 15-19 for the long-term exchange program**, depending on the laws of the countries involved. Within this age range, exchange candidates' ages must be agreed upon by both sending and hosting districts before finalizing the exchange and in accordance with the laws and regulations of both countries. In some instances, students must be older than 15 or younger than 19 in order to participate in a specific program.
-  • **Age 18-25 for the New Generations exchange program**
  - Ages set by district for short-term exchange program
  - Other age limits set by the district
  - Above-average academic performance
  - Ability to express oneself clearly and effectively
  - Demonstrated community leadership skills

### Students with Disabilities

Rotary clubs and districts are encouraged to consider students with disabilities as potential participants. Many exchanges involving students with disabilities have proven successful and beneficial to all involved.

## Additional Considerations

- Residency (within the sending district)
- Adaptability (outgoing, confident, and willing to adjust to changing surroundings)
- Potential for being an excellent Rotary ambassador
- Complete and unqualified support of parents
- Proficiency in or capacity to learn the language of the host country

When selecting Youth Exchange students:

1. Require students to complete a written application form that includes program rules and a signed compliance statement. Many clubs and districts distribute a short prescreening form to narrow the field of applicants before requesting a completed application. The *Rotary Youth Exchange Long-Term Program Application* (761-EN) is recommended for all long-term (academic-year) exchanges. Please refer to your district materials for the preferred application form.
2. Hold personal interviews with applicants and their parents or legal guardians at both the club and district levels. Discussion topics should include:
  - Feelings about the student spending time away from home and family
  - Awareness of world news and issues
  - Attitudes toward program rules
  - Feelings about the student being an ambassador for his or her city, country, and sending Rotary club
  - Perception of the purpose of an exchange

Sample questions are available at [www.rotary.org](http://www.rotary.org). Other interview activities might include asking the student to give a self-introductory speech and arranging an informal question-and-answer period with Youth Exchange alumni.

3. After reviewing applications and conducting interviews, select students based on these criteria:

- Maturity level
- Ability to exercise good judgment
- Compatibility with goals of Rotary's program
- Health, both physical and mental
- Number of students that the district can support. If not enough qualified students apply, refrain from filling all outbound slots rather than sending students who may struggle during their time abroad. Select alternates in the event that a student is unable to participate in the program.

After students have been selected and their participation confirmed by the district, notify students and their parents in writing. Outline any contingencies (for example, participation in orientation meetings, payment of fees) before final acceptance, and include a schedule and a date when the host country will be confirmed.

## Placing Students

Once outbound students are selected, based on the anticipated number of placements the district can reasonably identify, work with the district Youth Exchange committee or multidistrict contact to place students. Many districts have established long-standing exchange relationships that facilitate more efficient placement of students and strengthen the support system available to students during their exchange.



If your district doesn't have established exchange relationships or would like to develop new partnerships, RI's list of Youth Exchange district chairs and multidistrict officers can help you locate the appropriate contact for the district or the country where you'd like to place students. Review the multidistrict listing carefully, because most of these groups have contacts for each region other than the district chairs. Ensure that host districts are certified and responsive to your inquiries.

Once your district has located a placement for the student, develop a written agreement to be signed by the Youth Exchange officers in the participating districts and clubs, the student, and the student's parents. The guarantee form in the *Rotary Youth Exchange Long-Term Program Application* (761-EN) can serve as a basic agreement form. Make sure the agreement includes the expectations of the districts about the exchange (e.g., length of the exchange, number of host families) and all appropriate contact information.

Before the student's departure, continue communicating with your exchange partner in the host district. Inform all participants of the student's travel plans and arrival date. Ask the hosting district about plans for meeting the student at the airport and helping him or her settle in with the first host family. Request confirmation that the student has arrived safely.

## Providing Outbound Orientation

Outbound orientation, which is crucial in preparing students for the exchange experience, varies widely from one club or district to another. Rotary Youth Exchange programs that are part of a multidistrict group have the benefit of participating in larger-scale orientation programs. Orientation should be an ongoing process that includes weekend gatherings and shorter meetings during the year before departure. Give students reading materials about their host country and encourage them to use the Internet to learn more. This gradual/relaxed process gives students a chance to absorb and react to a large amount of information. **Abuse and harassment prevention training is required for all students and their parents.**



Outbound orientation should include the following topics:



### Program Information

- Rules and regulations
- Travel restrictions
- Finances
- Roles and responsibilities of participants
- Basic Rotary information
- Budgeting (allowance/stipend and costs)
- Contact information for the sending district chair, district governor, club president, and Rotarian counselor

### Expectations

- Suggestions for speaking at Rotary meetings (e.g., bring slides, pictures, maps from home)
- Communications with home
- Role as a Rotary ambassador

### Cultural Preparation

- Role of the host club and counselor
- Homesickness
- Adaptability and cultural tolerance
- Language training
- Host families and sample questions
- Cross-cultural preparation and research on host country
- Gift Giving

### Additional topics

- What it's like being an exchange student (brief presentation by a current inbound or former exchange student)
- Not all Rotary clubs are the same
- Cultural simulation games
- Understanding your own cultural expectations and assumptions

Parents should attend orientation sessions to speak with Youth Exchange officers, travel agents, alumni, and other parents. It's also strongly recommended that students spend time talking with alumni who studied in their future host country.

The best orientation sessions permit adequate time for discussion between outbound students and alumni. If possible, include inbound students as well.

### Safety

- Abuse and harassment prevention and awareness training, including reporting (*required*)
- Gender-specific breakout session to discuss sensitive issues (eating disorders, sexual harassment, etc.). Within rooms, it's a good idea to separate students by native language or according to countries/regions they are visiting.
- District 24-hour contact number and contact information for two non-Rotarian resource persons, one male and one female

### Travel Information

- Passport and visa information
- Finances/money
- Insurance, health care discussions
- Luggage, packing suggestions, etc.
- Youth Exchange Blazers

### Additional Information for Parents

- Parents-only meeting to discuss the challenges of being a parent of an exchange student, visiting the student abroad, and what the parent can expect during the homecoming

Tell the students and their parents or legal guardians that candidates are not accepted until they've completed this orientation session (infrequently, a candidate interviews well but interacts poorly with others). Ensure that both parents and students have an understanding of when the planned exchange is considered final and what additional elements are required from them and the host district. This orientation session is an ideal time to observe the students' reactions to session information and their interactions with other students and Rotarians.

Because students tend to interact more readily with people they consider their peers, consider inviting recently returned or ROTEX students to participate in orientation sessions. ROTEX students can often provide valuable insights about a candidate's suitability for an exchange based on these interactions.

## Working with Parents

The unconditional support of the student's parents is crucial before, during, and after the exchange. The parents of outbound students must be included in the selection and orientation process and well-informed about the following points.

### Financial Obligations and Insurance

All travel costs are paid by the student's parents, including expenses for passports and visas. Explain insurance requirements thoroughly, including any additional requirements made by the host country. Explain the purpose of an emergency fund.

#### Insurance

Insurance requirements should include travel, medical, and dental coverage for accidental injury and illness, death benefits (including repatriation of remains), disability/dismemberment benefit (also known as capital benefits), emergency medical evacuation, emergency visitation expenses, 24-hour emergency assistance services, and legal liability (covering the student for any of his or her acts or omissions in connection with the Youth Exchange program). At the option of the student's parents, such insurance may also cover cancellation expenses, loss of property, loss of money, or kidnap and ransom. Amounts must be satisfactory to the host and sending clubs and district, with coverage from the time the student leaves home until he or she returns.

### Rules for Students

Explain the rules and regulations of your Youth Exchange program, and request that both parents and students agree to them in writing. If parents are aware of your program rules, including those that apply to them as well as their child (for example, travel or communication restrictions during the exchange), they'll be less likely to violate them or encourage their son or daughter to do so.

### Parental Visits

It's a good idea to discourage parents from visiting their child during the exchange. Remind them that this is their child's exchange experience and a parental visit may trigger homesickness or have other negative effects. If they do plan to visit, strongly recommend that they do so only during the last two months of the exchange and never during holidays, as the host family may have other plans. Any visit must have the prior approval of both the host district and club.

## Correspondence

Encourage parents to correspond regularly with their child. Regular correspondence will keep parents informed of their child's experiences and, ideally, help them understand the changes and growth their child is experiencing. E-mail is cost effective and allows students and parents to work around time differences between home and host country. During the first month of the exchange, parents should try to maintain a balance between their need to know that their child arrived safely and is adjusting well and the student's need to overcome culture shock and assimilate into new surroundings.

## Preparing for the Student's Return



Reverse culture shock is an often-overlooked aspect of the exchange process, and it's important that parents be equipped to cope with it. Regular correspondence during the exchange will help parents handle the readjustment period after the student has returned. Remind parents that, while their lives may have remained basically the same during the exchange, their child has likely experienced profound changes.

One of the most common problems is the student's newfound independence; often, students find that the rules they lived under before the exchange now seem too restrictive. It's important for parents to try to understand the changes in their child and to work with them to incorporate these changes into their relationship.

## Maintaining Communication with Students

Clubs and districts should do everything possible to facilitate communication with the student during the exchange. Encourage students to write to their sending club and district as well as to parents and friends. Remind students that writing about their experience can help them better understand the changes they are undergoing and more fully appreciate the new way of life they are learning about.

Establish a reporting procedure with each student. Ask students to e-mail an update on the exchange to a designated Rotarian at least once a quarter and include these communications on your club or district Web site. Make sure all students have an emergency contact in your district.

## Helping Students and Parents after the Exchange

Hold a debriefing meeting for returning students and their parents to help them deal with reverse culture shock. Conduct postexchange evaluations.





# Inbound: Hosting a Youth Exchange Student

Hosting a Youth Exchange student provides Rotarians and non-Rotarians in your community with the opportunity to travel without leaving home. Local students and community members contribute to and benefit from the exchange experience. The rewards for all involved are great, but hosting a student requires a significant time commitment for Rotarians in the host club and district.

To arrange for the best exchange experience possible, the host club and district assume responsibility for the student and select host families, assign a Rotarian counselor, coordinate inbound orientation, and develop an effective support system for the student. Throughout the exchange, the host club and district communicate regularly with the students, invite them to social and cultural events, and immediately address any serious problems that arise.

In addition, the host club and district should help inbound students obtain visas, make arrangements for meeting them at the airport, and coordinate enrollment and tuition payment, if necessary, at local schools.

## Identifying Host Clubs

Each district has clubs well suited to hosting exchange students. The district Youth Exchange committee should work with the governor and assistant governors to identify clubs that have an interest in the program and the capacity to support an inbound student. District committee members should provide clubs with a realistic expectation of the time commitment that a club assumes when hosting a student. Host clubs must be willing to recruit, screen, and train host families and Rotarian counselors.



## Recruiting Host Families

Long-term exchange students must have more than one host family during their exchange, preferably three different families.

The best host families are responsible, willing, and interested in welcoming a young person from another country into their home. Host families do not need to be Rotarian families; in fact, people often become interested in joining Rotary because of their involvement in Youth Exchange. Host families can be recruited using many of the same tools used to advertise the program to potential students (see chapter 3).

Suggestions for finding prospective host families:

- Ask Rotarians to recommend non-Rotarian families they feel are qualified and may be interested in hosting a Youth Exchange student.
- Encourage Rotarians to host students. You may wish to make this appeal during a meeting at which spouses are present or after another student has attended a meeting and has met many of the club's members.
- Ask the families of Youth Exchange alumni to act as hosts. Many of these families would like to participate in the program because of the opportunity provided to their own children.
- Ask Youth Exchange alumni for the names of families in their communities they feel would make good host parents.
- Make a presentation about the Youth Exchange program to your local parent-teacher association. Ask if anyone in attendance is interested in becoming a host family.
- Ask families who have successfully hosted students to recommend other families in the community who would be interested in hosting.
- Keep in contact with Youth Exchange alumni; they may now make excellent host families and future Rotarians.

## Screening and Selecting Host Families

Families that inquire about hosting a student should be sent a letter of acknowledgment, the Host Family Application, and the Youth Volunteer Agreement available at [www.rotary.org](http://www.rotary.org). When reviewing applications and interviewing prospective hosts, look for responsible, willing families who will exercise appropriate parental responsibility. Identify a variety of families, including some with younger children, some with children around the age of the student, and some with no children in the home. All of these types of families can make excellent hosts. Don't settle for families who are only willing to provide room and board — seek out those who will actively enhance the exchange experience by involving the students in many different community activities.

### **Reciprocal Hosting**

Parents of outbound long-term exchange students cannot be required to host as a condition of their child's participation in the program, but they may host students if interested or may be asked to assist in finding suitable host families. Screen these families as carefully as you do other host families. The short-term exchange program often includes a "family to family" component; in these situations, districts can require reciprocal hosting in order for a student to participate.

Thorough screening of host families and explanation of responsibilities are essential. Program rules and requirements should be clearly outlined on the application, and host families must complete and sign the application, compliance statement, and authorization for background checks. Background checks, including law enforcement public record checks and reference checks, must be done for all adult members of the host family.

Before selecting host families, visit applicants in their home at a time when all family members who live in the home are present. During the visit, review the responsibilities of host parents and give them a copy of *A Guide for Host Families* (749-EN) and any additional information that your club or district may have on the program and hosting students from abroad. Both announced and unannounced home visits should be made before and during the exchange. In communities where unannounced visits are not socially acceptable, unannounced visits may be substituted with visits of very short notice.

When screening host families and visiting homes, consider the following questions:

- Why is the family interested in hosting an exchange student?
- What experience (e.g., travel abroad, professional experience, knowledge of foreign languages) do family members have with different cultures?
- How would the family incorporate an exchange student into their daily life? What chores would be assigned to the student? What additional activities would the family plan to help a young person from abroad get to know their host country and community better?
- How would the host parents handle difficult situations with a student? Would they provide appropriate supervision and take on parental responsibility to ensure the student's well-being? How would they handle language and communication challenges, discipline and emotional issues, and culture shock?
- Is the family committed to attending orientation and training for host families and facilitating student involvement in required Rotary activities?
- What is the general condition of the home (clean, adequate heat and light, etc.)? Would you want your child or grandchild living in this home? Does the family have the necessary resources to host a student (space, time, good health)?
- What are the planned sleeping arrangements for the student? (The student must have his or her own bed. If the student must share a room, it must be with a child of the same gender, preferably of similar age.)
- How will the student get to school and activities?

### **Effective Hosts**

The most effective host families are

- Caring and respectful with each other
- Curious about different activities and places outside the home and interested in a variety of topics
- Flexible (able to adapt to having someone new in the home)
- Good humored and able to put a problem or situation into perspective
- Patient and willing to work through common misunderstandings

## **Placing Students with Host Families**

Once a host family has met all screening and training requirements, they can be matched with inbound students. In making a good match for both students and families, consider:

- Similar interests (recreation, hobbies, sporting and cultural activities)
- Similar ages of siblings, if possible (especially for the student's first host family)
- Personalities and values of the individuals

It's best to place students with their first host family immediately upon arrival in their host country rather than making a temporary placement.

Rotarians responsible for inbound students should support and advise host families and make sure they understand their responsibilities. Host families must receive training that includes information on program administration and rules as well as abuse and harassment awareness and prevention.

Host families are essential to the program, and Rotarians in the host club should work to maintain a positive relationship with the families. Invite them to club events, and show appreciation in person and through written thank-you notes. Following an exchange, ask each family to complete an evaluation form. Cultivating a relationship with host families increases the possibility that they will want to host students in the future.

Occasionally, a host family situation does not work out, and all inbound programs should have at least one prescreened host family available to accept a student in an emergency. Try to find an experienced host family skilled in problem solving and working with youth in a crisis situation.

## **Selecting the Rotarian Counselor**

As the Rotarian in closest contact with the student, the counselor is critical to the success of an exchange. Because long-term students will live with more than one host family, the Rotarian counselor is the one consistent resource for students throughout their exchange. The counselor must be able to encourage the student during challenging times and facilitate his or her involvement in school, club, and community life. A Rotarian counselor must not be a member of the host family and should not serve as a club or district Youth Exchange chair.

Selection considerations:

- **Conflicts of interest.** If a problem should arise, the student must feel comfortable talking with the counselor.
- **Gender.** Assign counselors of the same gender as students when possible. If a student has a counselor of a different gender, assign a person of the same gender (either Rotarian or non-Rotarian) as an additional resource person.
- **Commitment.** Assess the Rotarian's willingness and ability to devote more time and energy to the exchange than is required of other host club members.

## Communicating with Students before Arrival

Once inbound students have been assigned to counselors and host families, send the following welcome and orientation materials:

- General schedule of the exchange year, including district meetings, outings, travel opportunities, and other activities
- Name and contact information for the first host family
- Name and contact information for the Rotarian counselor
- General information about the community and country (local geography, history, government) and the culture (colloquial phrases, meaning of certain gestures, customary greetings, holiday traditions, social customs, religious beliefs and practices)
- Practical information about climate, clothing, and school
- District rules, insurance requirements, and emergency fund amounts
- Expectations about speaking engagements at clubs

Encourage communication between the student and the first host family and Rotarian counselor before the student's arrival to establish a link with these two critical resources and ease the transition once the student arrives.



## Providing Inbound Orientation

Meet all students upon arrival, and facilitate their introduction to the first host family. Rotarian counselors should be present at this meeting, but try to also include as many club members as possible. Although prearrival correspondence can help ease this transition, both the student and the host family will be full of questions and apprehensions. The Interactive First Night Questions can help the host family and student work through some of the practicalities of the exchange/host family experience. These questions will introduce the issue of house rules and other important topics that should be addressed early in an exchange. Because many inbound students struggle with the language of the host country in the first weeks or months of an exchange, the questions should be provided in both the student's native language and the language of the host country.

Hold formal inbound orientation within one or two weeks of the student's arrival, either as a group, such as a district or multidistrict orientation, or individually.

Inbound orientation should cover the following topics:

### Program Information

- Rules and regulations for students established by the host club, district, and multidistrict
- Consequences for breaking a program rule
- Policy on student travel and forms and permission needed
- Monthly allowance
- Host contact information for district chair, district governor, club president, and Rotarian counselor

### Expectations

- Student's role as a Rotary ambassador
- Participation in Rotary club meetings and at local Rotary events
- Communications with home
- School attendance and participation in extracurricular activities
- Use of computers, Internet, e-mail

### Cultural Concerns

- Local customs and colloquial phrases
- Information about gestures, personal space, and communication differences
- Gender, personal hygiene, time, and respect for elders

### Health and Safety

- Information on local laws and customs that apply to young people
- Information on reporting incidents of abuse and harassment
- District 24-hour contact number and contact information for two non-Rotarian resource people, one male and one female
- Contacts for local medical, dental, and mental health professionals
- Local social service resources, where available, including suicide prevention hotlines, rape crisis hotlines, and child protection and law enforcement agencies



## Providing Assistance during the Exchange

Throughout the exchange, the Rotarian counselor and members of the host club should communicate regularly with the student, make any necessary financial arrangements, and help facilitate the transition from one host family to the next.

The Rotarian counselor should be available to the student at all times to discuss questions or concerns about the host family or the school. Find a place to talk about such issues away from the host family. In addition to responding to calls from the student, the Rotarian counselor should initiate communication with the student at least once a month by phone or in person.

The counselor or another qualified Rotarian should visit the student in the host family's home to make sure that living arrangements are consistent with what was agreed upon during the screening.

Invite students to cultural and social gatherings. Continue the orientation as needed to help the student cope with specific cultural issues. Work with the community and the student's school to get the student involved in positive activities and community life.

Make sure that students have the following contact information:

- Rotarian counselor
- Club president
- District Youth Exchange chair and governor
- Two non-Rotarian resource people, one male and one female
- Local medical and social services
- Local law enforcement agencies

Maintain regular contact with the student's sending district throughout the exchange.

In addition to paying school and textbook fees, the club should give the student a monthly allowance, as needed, to cover expenses such as school lunches and social events. These amounts vary from country to country.

Host clubs and Rotarian counselors also should help students make the transition from one host family to the next. To make this process as smooth as possible:

- Give the student advance notice, including an exact date for the move. If possible, arrange for the student to meet the family and visit their home before the move.
- Provide the new host family's contact information to the student and the student's parents or legal guardians before the move.
- Use the same getting-acquainted activities with each new host family, including a discussion of the Interactive First Night Questions.
- Help the student move all belongings to the new home.

## Dealing with Early Returns

Approximately 3 percent of all exchange students return home early. Some leave because of homesickness, illness, or problems back home. Others are sent home because of problems that occur in the host country during the exchange. A student can be sent home for violating a district Youth Exchange program rule or for geopolitical crises or other health and safety issues that may arise during the exchange. However, a student must not be sent home solely for reporting problems, especially incidents of abuse or harassment.

### Students and Crime

In the worst case scenario, a student can be involved in a crime during an exchange.

If a student is a witness to or victim of a crime, the decision to return early or stay should be left to the student and his or her parents. This choice is especially important for sexual assault victims, who may feel that being sent home early from the exchange is a punishment for reporting the crime. If a student elects to return home, confirm with local law enforcement that he or she isn't needed in the host country as a witness before making travel arrangements.

If a student is accused of a crime, local law enforcement will determine if and when the student can leave the country.

Although orientation on program rules should always focus on the consequences of rule violations, breaking a rule is not always a reason to send a student home.

Early returns should be managed delicately and always with the full knowledge of the sending club and district and the student's parents. Whatever the cause of the early return, do not send a student home until both the hosting and sending district agree to specific travel arrangements and the student's parents have been notified. When the sending and hosting districts disagree about an early return, district governors should be notified and assist in mediation.

When faced with an early return of an inbound student, take the following steps:

1. Discuss the situation with the student and the Rotarian counselor. Ensure that all options to avoid the early return have been attempted or explored, including warning students when initial problem behaviors surface or mediating in difficult host family situations.
2. Contact your counterpart in the sending district, and specify the exact reason(s) the student is being sent home. Copy any relevant multidistrict groups on the communication.
3. Allow the student to contact his or her parents, or offer to contact them for the student.
4. Work with the sending district contact and the parents to arrange an acceptable return travel itinerary.
5. Help the student make departure arrangements and facilitate leave-taking from the host family and school friends.
6. Notify relevant government agencies about visa status.
7. Notify the district governor and RI in writing that a student is being sent home. Include the name of the student, sending district, date of return, and reason(s) for return.
8. Ensure that the student has arrived home safely.

## Saying Goodbye

During the final weeks of an exchange, many students struggle with conflicting emotions about leaving the new friends they've made and returning home. Inbound programs should work with students to make the transition as smooth as possible.

- **Involve host families.** The host family may begin to feel neglected as the student becomes increasingly involved in year-end school activities and social gatherings. Help them anticipate some of the emotions they may experience when it's time for the student to return home.
- **Plan end-of-year activities.** Give inbound students a chance to say goodbye to the people they've met throughout the year. Some programs arrange travel opportunities for students to allow them to see more of the host country before returning home, but this is not standard practice for all exchanges.
- **Finalize travel arrangements.** Work with the student's parents and sending district to finalize travel plans. Help the student with packing, shipping, and planning for departure.
- **Invite students to participate in outbound orientation.** As part of your program for outbound students from your country, develop a special orientation session for the inbounds that focuses on the year in review, the re-entry process, and preparation for reverse culture shock.
- **Conduct evaluations.** Survey all program participants — students, host families, Rotarian counselors, and others — to gather insight and information to assist in future exchanges.





# Youth Exchange Resources

Publications from RI available for download or purchase at [www.rotary.org](http://www.rotary.org):

- *Abuse and Harassment Prevention Training Manual and Leaders' Guide* (775-EN)  
Designed to help Rotarians provide a safe and secure environment for participants in RI youth programs. Includes a CD with electronic copies of the manual and slides.
- *A Guide for an Exchange Student* (752-EN) This booklet for exchange students and their parents describes how to prepare for an exchange and what to expect.
- *A Guide for Host Families* (749-EN) This booklet describes some of the joys and responsibilities that a family hosting an exchange student can anticipate.
- *Long-Term Youth Exchange Program Application Form* (761-EN)
- *Short-Term Youth Exchange Program Application Form* (763-EN)
- *Making a World of Difference: Youth Exchange* (755-EN) Promotional brochure aimed at students.
- *Discover Your World: Short-Term Youth Exchange* (756-EN) Promotional brochure for students; can be used as a stand-alone piece or inserted into the brochure *Making a World of Difference: Youth Exchange*.
- *Youth Exchange Poster* (751-EN) Designed to promote the program to potential exchange students, the poster features images of Youth Exchange and has a blank corner space for imprinting name of club and contact person.
- *Youth Exchange Postcards* (750-MU) Eye-catching postcards, blank on one side, that may be used by Rotarians to promote Youth Exchange participation or by students while on exchanges.
- *Youth Exchange Certificate* (747-EN) Presented to Youth Exchange students at the end of their exchange. Name field is blank for district to fill in; requires signature of district Youth Exchange committee chair.

Additional RI Web site resources:

- List of noncertified districts
- Youth Volunteer Agreement
- Interactive First Night Questions

Additional online resources:

- YEOTalk at Yahoo! Groups
- Rotary Youth Exchange Officer Resources ([www.yeoresources.org](http://www.yeoresources.org))



# Glossary

**alumni** Youth Exchange students who have successfully completed a Rotary exchange.

**background check** Part of screening process for any adult volunteer or adult member of a host family who will have direct unsupervised contact (contact without other adults present) with one or more Youth Exchange students. In general, it includes checks of references and law enforcement public records.

**certification program, RI** Minimum requirements established by RI for exchange program operation best practices and youth protection. Only districts recognized by RI as certified may participate in the Youth Exchange program.

**culture shock** Difficulty in adjusting to a new culture. Can include feelings of disorientation and alienation. This typically occurs at the beginning of an exchange.

**district** Name given to a limited territory within which a number of clubs are grouped for RI administrative purposes.

**district chair** Rotarian appointed by the district governor to head the district committee for a given program or area.

**district committee** Rotarians appointed to manage district operation of a given program or area.

**district governor** Rotarian elected to oversee operation of all activities within a Rotary district.

**district youth protection officer** Member of the district Youth Exchange committee who is responsible for maintaining youth protection policies and procedures for the Youth Exchange program; serves as the first point of contact should any Rotarian receive an allegation of abuse or harassment. This person should have experience in youth protection, social work, law enforcement, or a similar field.

**early return** Designation for a student who returns to his or her home country before the scheduled end of an exchange.

**homestay** A hosting arrangement in which a student lives in the home of a host family.

**host** To receive a student from another country or district into your own country or district; to act as a host club or host district.

**host family** Family selected by the Rotary club to provide accommodations for the student and act as the student's family during a period of the exchange.

**inbound** Designation for Youth Exchange students coming into your country or district from another country or district.

**long-term exchange** A yearlong (10- to 12-month) exchange that includes academic enrollment.



**multidistrict Youth Exchange group** An administrative body representing a larger geographic area established to support exchange activities, such as student applications, travel arrangements, insurance, visa processing, and orientation.

**orientation** Training sessions, often scheduled over a weekend, for outbound and inbound students to prepare them for their exchange.

**outbound** Designation for students departing your country or district to be hosted by another country or district.

**preconvention meeting** A meeting on a specific subject (e.g., Youth Exchange) held in conjunction with (and immediately before) the annual convention of Rotary International.

**rebound** Designation for a student who has recently returned home from an exchange.

**reverse culture shock** Adjustment difficulties and disorientation experienced by the student upon return home.

**Rotarian counselor** Member of host Rotary club appointed to serve as the student's main contact with the club. Acts as liaison between the student, Rotary club, district, host family, and community at large. This individual must not be a member of the student's host family.

**ROTEX** Groups of Youth Exchange alumni who meet for fellowship or to support Youth Exchange programs through promotion and involvement in orientation; not an official RI program.

**sending club/district** Club or district in an outbound student's home country.

**short-term exchange** An exchange lasting several days to several weeks. Most short-term exchanges do not include an academic program; some feature a camp or tour.

**Youth Exchange officer** A Rotarian appointed or elected to hold office on a district or club Youth Exchange committee. The district Youth Exchange chair is the Youth Exchange officer for the district.

**Youth Exchange student** Young person participating in a Youth Exchange program.







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