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# Rotary Youth Leadership Awards

A Guide for Rotary Clubs in District #7780

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## What is RYLA?

At the surface, RYLA is a four-day, three-night leadership program for students entering their junior year of high school. However, RYLA is so much more than that; **RYLA changes lives.** Between the curriculum, location, and staff, RYLA provides its participants with a chance to grow as leaders and people on an individual level while in a group setting.

Positive Youth Leadership Development starts with getting a feeling of increased self-confidence and self-esteem. A leader that knows who they are and how to move beyond their comfort zone consciously has empathy for those that follow them. The ability to take time to reflect in after action reviews allow for the habit of seeking feedback loops that allow for a continual self & team improvement environment. Reflection on strengths as well as obstacles helps with establishing a pattern of behavior in which feedback is expected and looked for without having judgment attached.



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# Curriculum

Our Curriculum is broken down into three major functions. First, the core curriculum RYLA uses is a series of programs meant to strengthen the participant's understanding and competency in their areas of focus. The second is physical challenges and feedback sessions using the COPE course. Finally, we add in fun, through time with water volleyball or other water activity, skits, campfires with smores and many group games.

**Ethics:** Each participant assumes the identity of a student applying to college. The goal is for to decide which six students out of a group of twelve, which receive full admittance to RYLA University. Not only does this activity get participants thinking about what it means to make ethical decisions, but they also are enlightened about personal biases or judgments they or others may have. Our perceptions and judgments have an impact on our decisions.

**The Crash:** Using a choose your adventure format, participants have to make a variety of decisions under different circumstances. This program focuses on multi-level decision making that has consequences. The decisions are made causing another set of circumstances to unfold.

**Community Build:** Participants are split into three communities and are asked to brainstorm and build their ideal community. Each community has resources ranging from abundance to extremely limited. The mayor of the town with the new community treats each group with a different way of being full of prejudice. This program gives participants a new awareness surrounding social justice issues. Often discussions of discrimination, equality, and the treatment of others take place.

**Leadership Strengths:** This program uses a handful of writing prompts that guide participants through identifying their unique leadership strengths. The open conversation focuses on how to best use one's unique strengths in the student's life currently.

**Public Speaking:** Participants are asked to prepare and deliver a short speech to their college admissions interview board. The prompt asks to talk about an accomplishment, obstacle, or opportunity they have experienced. This activity gives students the opportunity to become more confident in public speaking and practicing giving and receiving positive

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and constructive criticism. We tape the speeches and students watch them back and then delete them.



A COPE, challenging outdoor personal experience, course, both low elements (close to the ground) and a high ropes (suspended above the ground) are used to present team building and individual analysis. A feedback loop mechanism is used at RYLA to ensure that participants are gaining from their experiences. The process of completing a task, reviewing how the task went is just the beginning. By the end of the week, participants are asked to go beyond just analyzing the task into analyzing how they individually performed, and how they can take this lesson forward into their lives.

The repetitive process builds and grows as students can test different leadership styles in a place that has no judgment.

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## Staffing

RYLA's staff consists of approximately fifty individuals who volunteer a week of their time to make the program what it is. Almost every staff member attended RYLA and applied back to be apart of the program that changed their lives. Through a variety of roles, staff member assists in providing a positive, unique experience for each the participants

The staff also works throughout the rest of the year to improve and organize RYLA for next year. These tasks include updating the curriculum, organizing training sessions for the staff, reaching out to Rotary Clubs, and making sure everything is ready for the next RYLA.

## How to Apply

Applications for RYLA will be available online at <http://rotary7780.org/sitepage/ryla/>. We are also in the process of developing an RYLA7780.org website. The first part of applying will consist of students applying to your Rotary club with basic contact information, a few short essays, and some clubs may require a letter of recommendation. Clubs that take the time to interview or host a parent information session have the most success with students attending. The student application form will be available to be printed off at our website. Once you have chosen the students that you will sponsor for RYLA, please forward the signed application forms to RYLA.



## How to Interest Potential Participants

In the past, some Rotary Clubs have mentioned that they have struggled to find students who are interested or able to attend RYLA. This section will discuss a few methods some Rotary Clubs and schools have used to identify students who would be successful at RYLA.

The first recommendation is to connect with the guidance counselors at the high schools in your club's area. Guidance counselors tend to be a good liaison between the Rotary Club and the students and teachers. The RYLA staff is looking to connect with all high school guidance counselors within district 7780 and can discuss the curriculum with them.

Some clubs have had success by having past RYLA participants and a member of the Rotary club speak to the sophomore class or a selection of students who would benefit from this Outdoor Leadership camp. By hearing about the great opportunity, RYLA is from peers can help encourage students that are on the fence about participating.

Some clubs have hosted Parents Nights for RYLA. This night consists of having the students who will be attending RYLA, their parents, and Rotary members gathering to tell the parents about the great opportunity their children are going to have. This night usually occurs after students are selected. Not only is this a chance to tell parents about the program and all it has to offer, but it can also be a chance to highlight that this is an award that the students are being given and will be at no cost to the parents.



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## Frequently Asked Questions

Why are no electronics or cell phones allowed?

The logistics help with this with no electricity to charge phones, but the real reason is to help participants disconnect from distractions so they can focus on their leadership development and building trust with a group of new lifelong friends.

How many Students go to RYLA?

We have slots for 144 students each year.

How many Students can one club send?

The limit is 12 students from one High School, allowing for no students from the same high school to be in a group together. Some clubs have two high schools in their area and budget for 20 students. Other clubs set a limit of four to six students.

We are getting closer each year to the max of 144 so the earlier you reserve your spots, the better.

What type of student should attend RYLA?

As long as a student is willing to come to RYLA with an open mind, they will be successful.

Can District **#7780's** RYLA accommodate students with physical disabilities?

There is a great deal of walking, climbing up steep hills and bumpy trails, and activities that are physically based. If the disability prohibits any of the previously mentioned aspects of the program, it will not be able to be accommodated.

Can District **#7780's** RYLA accommodate dietary needs?

Yes, we will ask during the application process if the participants have any special dietary needs and will make sure to be prepared for them.

What is the cost of RYLA?

The cost of the clubs for students is \$375.00 per student. We also need to find enough funds to send our staff to camp, so the cost to support a staff member is also \$375.00.

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What is the real value of RYLA?

We value camp at \$750.00 per participant. There are over 1000 unpaid volunteer hours from staff members taking their weeks vacation to be at RYLA and be a facilitator.

What are the deadlines for RYLA?

Clubs should be looking for students by the end of February.

Clubs should submit final student names to RYLA staff by the end of April early May. The staff needs to collect medical forms and other material from each student.

June 1<sup>st</sup> – Deadline for students getting their medical forms to RYLA Staff. Medical forms are confidential and should not be collected by individual clubs or other school staff. The preferred method of collection is having parents mail directly to RYLA P.O. Box.

June 1<sup>st</sup> – Deadline for a student to back out of RYLA and for a club to receive a refund.

The camp is always the end of June and Starts on a Sunday and goes through Wednesday night for students.

**NOTE: We will accept students after the deadlines on the basis there is space and the student can get the forms signed by doctors.**

What happens if a student backs out after the June 1<sup>st</sup> deadline?

Clubs can find another student to replace the student backing out. The collection of medical forms is sometimes a barrier, and students don't often understand that a Rotary Club has paid for them to attend. Because of limited space it is important to let students know it is a \$750.00 value and they are committed to attending camp.

If the club does find a student replacement, please contact RYLA staff as soon as possible so staff can be in contact with parents.

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## Contact Us

Email: philtastic7780@gmail.com

-Cell Phone: 207-636-6500

- Mailing Address: RLYA – P.O. Box 124 Kennebunk, ME 04043

Website: Rotary District 7780 - <http://rotary7780.org/sitepage/ryla/>

Website: Future RYLA Site: -<http://ryla7780.org>

Please Contact Phil Giordano – RYLA chair and Executive Director of Camp if you have any questions or need additional information.

