

Rotary Youth Exchange

Best Practices



Rotary Youth Exchange staff conduct four or five district evaluations in various parts of the world each year. Through these interviews with students and volunteers, we have identified a few best practices to address common challenges facing many districts worldwide. We would like to share this information to help your district to address similar issues and increase club participation in the program.

- Encourage clubs to co-host students

One of the most common concerns facing host clubs is difficulty finding suitable host families. Co-hosting inbound students between clubs can reduce the financial and administrative burden of hosting. Co-hosting can also be a means to encouraging participation from clubs that have never hosted or might not otherwise get involved. Note that this solution is most effective if the Rotary clubs are near one another.

- Clearly define and support the roles of Club YEO/Chair and Rotary Counselor

There is sometimes a lack of clarity across the roles of club YEO/chair and the student's Rotary counselor. When the same Rotarian serves as both the club's primary program contact and as advocate for the student that club is hosting, this can create volunteer burnout and can diminish their ability to build an effective and neutral support structure for the student. In order to avoid such situations, clearly define each of these roles and delegate specific tasks to the appropriate position.

- Foster early and regular communication between the student and their counselor.

Inbound students sometimes report that they do not feel that they can go to their counselor for help or advice. In order to build and maintain a strong counselor-student relationship, some districts do the following:

- Require counselors to reach out to students and their natural family before they arrive and ask them to greet the student at the airport.
 - Encourage counselors to arrange activities with their students that do not always involve Rotary. Whether a music lesson, a museum tour, or just meeting for coffee, taking time early on to build a strong relationship with the student can make it easier to identify and manage problems later on when in-person communication naturally wanes.
- Utilize creative means of communication to support clubs in large, rural districts

If your district is geographically expansive or covers multiple countries, this can pose inherent challenges in administering your program.

- Encourage volunteers within a particular metropolitan area or region to form resource groups and meet on a regular basis to share experiences and best practices.
 - Use technology as a training tool. Consider utilizing Skype or webinars to deliver training to volunteers and students or to allow the participation of individuals in remote areas.
 - Establish a Youth Exchange newsletter or Facebook group (invitation-only). These media not only provide an outlet for showcasing students' exchange experiences, but also can be used to disseminate news and contact information.
- Make connections to promote student engagement and language acclimatization.

While most districts are generally impressed with the speed in which students learn the native language and make connections with peers outside of the program, there are often concerns for the students who do not seem to engage with their host community. Here were some practices that other districts have used in alleviating such issues:

- Consider requiring students to learn the language of their host district before they arrive. While many host districts offer language classes upon arrival and immersion tends to quickly generate an understanding of the language, the sponsor district might also consider providing a program for language acquisition prior to the exchange.
- Put your inbound students in touch with outbound students that will be studying in their home country. Not only will this assist with language acquisition, but they can introduce each other to friends in their host community.
- Include alumni or ROTEX members in your outbound student orientation to provide invaluable information on what to expect in the local culture of their host district. Pair up outbound students with ROTEX leaders in a mentor-mentee relationship.