



YMCA YOUTH EXCHANGES CANADA

Workbook for Exchange Leaders



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Canada 

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Workbook for the YMCA Exchange Leaders

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9. ACTIVITIES – *examples of team building activities can be found on the Group Leader website.*

10. FACT SHEETS AND FORMS- *all forms and templates are found on the Group Leader website*

www.yecgl.net

1. Getting started

Youth Exchanges Canada

YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada gives Canadian youth, aged 12 to 17, a chance to expand their vision of themselves and their country.

YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada is an exchange between two groups of equal size in different communities. Each group hosts the other group. Groups have 10 to 30 participants of the same age.

Exchange activities—preparing to travel, travelling and hosting, and doing follow-up events—are opportunities for participants to work with their community, develop their interpersonal and group skills, and learn about the diversity of Canada’s people.

YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada is open to groups from all regions, cultures, religions, ethnic groups and economic circumstances.

The average length of an exchange is seven to ten days (minimum five) in the host community.

Funding

The Government of Canada, through the YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada Program, funds special measures and the travel costs between communities. Groups are responsible for other costs.

Objectives

- Contribute to improved knowledge and understanding of Canada among Canadian youth, enabling them to learn first-hand about the history, geography, economy, institutions, cultures, communities, languages and other facets of their country.
- Help young Canadians connect to one another and create links throughout the country and among groups, thereby helping to strengthen the fabric of Canadian society.
- Develop Canadian identity and attachment to Canada among youth by enhancing appreciation of both the diversity and the shared aspects of the Canadian experience.
- Contribute to the development of leadership skills in young Canadians.
- Foster a stronger sense of community by providing opportunities for youth to become actively engaged in their own and other communities in Canada.

The program

Preparing to travel

The group prepares to host their twin and to travel to their twin community. They collect information, contact their exchange group, and raise funds and public awareness.

In this process, the group involves the community, learns about the geographic, social and cultural realities of the twin group, and increases their knowledge of their home community.

Travelling and hosting

Groups experience the diversity of Canada by visiting the twin community and learn to see their own community through their “twin’s eyes” when hosting.

Participants live in a community that may be very different from their own, showcase their own community to a new person, and interact with peers who may speak another language and be from another culture.

Youth engagement

When it comes to planning for the exchange, youth are often an untapped resource. The participants can help plan, take on responsibilities, and organize activities. It will lead to a greater commitment to the exchange and a greater ownership of their experience.

More people sharing the work makes sense for the group leader too!

After travelling

The group consolidates the exchange experience by participating in follow-up activities and evaluation exercises.

What participants gain from the exchange

Participants learn to accept cultural differences, understand and appreciate Canadian diversity, and analyze the good and the bad points of the exchange experience.

Participants develop pride in the group’s accomplishments and see how their group and culture fit within the Canadian context.

Group members develop interpersonal, communication, organizational and leadership skills. Working on the exchange plans also helps build self-confidence and self-esteem.

Getting help and advice

Want insight into some of the ins and outs of the exchange process? Talk with someone who has “walked a mile in your shoes.” A former Group Leader is available to answer your questions and provide you with helpful hints. Call your YMCA Regional Coordinator if you’d like to contact a former exchange leader.

Please call your YMCA Regional Coordinator for advice at any time.

How you use this workbook is up to you

This workbook is designed for group leaders and is based on the YMCA’s four decades of experience with exchange programs.

The way you use the information in this book will depend on the nature of your group, where your twin group is located, and how much time you have to plan your exchange.

The checklist on the previous page also serves as an index. The note column is blank as your schedule depends on how much time you have. Talk to your YMCA Regional Coordinator about due dates. You can also get some advice on scheduling.

This book is a guide. As the group leader, you mould your exchange to the realities of your group and your community.

If you have any questions or comments after reading the handbook, please contact the Exchange office at 1-877-639-9987 or your Regional Coordinator. We welcome your suggestions.

Advice from youth



This icon identifies ideas from members of our former YMCA Youth Advisory Committee (youth aged 15–18 from across Canada). Group leaders should actively engage youth to help plan and organize their exchange. Their level of involvement will depend on their abilities, but all members can be involved in some way. It will benefit both the participants and the leader.

2. Building the groups

Building your group is the cornerstone of a successful exchange. You want to create an atmosphere of comfort, safety and trust among the group members and to involve parents/guardians and community members in preparing for the exchange.

Confirm group members

Before you begin planning and fundraising, get a firm commitment from your group members. The exchange experience begins with the planning and lasts until the follow-up and evaluation activities have been completed. It's important that all members participate in all three phases of the exchange.

If a participant drops out during the planning, either find a replacement or agree with the leader of your twin group to reduce the size of both groups. As the exchange involves twinning group members, the groups need to be the same size. Please notify your Regional Coordinator as soon as you are made aware that a change needs to be made and they will advise you on next steps.

Include everyone

YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada encourages the participation of youth from traditionally under-represented groups. Priority is given to groups that have at least 30 per cent of their participants from these five groups:

- Youth from low-income households—a person who lives in a household earning less than the low-income cutoff as defined by Statistics Canada is considered to be from a low-income household
- Indigenous youth—a member of a First Nation, a Métis or an Inuit
- Youth with disabilities—a person who has difficulties with daily living activities or who has a physical or mental condition or health problem that reduces the kind or amount of activities they can do
- Visible minority youth—an individual, other than an Indigenous person, who is non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour
- Youth from rural or isolated areas—a person who lives in a community with a population of less than 10,000.

Special measures funding

Special measures funding have been adopted to encourage all Canadian youth to participate in YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada.

Some groups and youth who would like to participate face barriers. For example, some families may have a safe home and would like to host but face economic barriers. Community meals may enable them to participate, and the YMCA can provide assistance for food.

In other cases, alternative housing is required. There may be families who would have difficulties hosting a youth in their home. Many barriers may be overcome with sensitive handling by the group. If there are circumstances that would prevent only a few participants from being hosted in a home, arrangements could be made for billets with another family. Another option is to have the group stay in alternative accommodations such as dormitories (we call this a common stay).

Some youth with disabilities may require accommodations. You should consult with them to prepare a detailed list, determining whether there is a need for modified vehicles, accessible home or equipment. Keep in mind such needs may be more easily accommodated in urban centers. Additional funding required for attendants or for other measures related to the needs of the youth with disabilities will be considered.

Whatever your group's needs may be, your YMCA Regional Coordinator will help you find the best way to accommodate them. If local community resources are not available, you may ask for more support. Additional funding may be available. Your Regional Coordinator will evaluate the needs and resources case by case.

Hold first meeting

At this meeting, discuss and agree on how you will work together as a group. By the end of it, you will have an outline of your next steps.

Intros

- Do introductions and warm-up exercise (ask each member to say what they want to learn from the exchange and why they're interested in participating).

Goals

- Review the goals of the three phases of the exchange process and the activities of each phase.

Responsibilities

- Outline your responsibilities as group leader, which of those you share with group members and which are yours alone.
- Discuss and agree on the responsibilities of group members.

Participation requirements

- How many meetings are they to attend? When will they be held? Weekly? Bi-weekly?

Ways of work

- Will they be expected to work in committees? Small groups?

Costs

- What will be the costs? How much will the group need to raise? How will youth be involved in fundraising?

Get info

- How will you collect information on your twin community? On your own community?
- How will the group record the information? Keep track of resources?

Permission

- Distribute Participant’s Consent (Form 1) to each member. Invite parents/guardians to this first meeting and have a consent signing party!

Next meeting

- Draw up a schedule of meetings

Consequences

- Discuss what happens if someone doesn’t meet the agreed-upon expectations for participation.

“We had weekly meetings to discuss fundraising and planning for the exchange. All participants were expected to attend. During some of these meetings, we had an activity such as writing letters to our twin group. Other meetings were specifically for fundraising.”

Meetings... more meetings...

You will probably want to hold regular meetings throughout the planning process. Regular get-togethers keep everyone up to date and build a sense of community and commitment.

If you are a school, involve other teachers, the local school board, and the principal in these meetings. If you a community organization, involve other staff, volunteers, the board of directors, and other partners or community members in meetings. Regular bulletins or newsletters can keep people informed.

Get permission

Make sure your group members have parental/guardian approval—signed consent forms (Form 1). Check to see what authorization you’ll need from your association or school.

You, along with every other chaperone or leader who is participating, will have to fill out the Leader’s acceptance (Form 2).

Each form must be the **original, completely filled out, and signed** (in blue or black ink). Without this form, the YMCA will not make travel arrangements.

You must hand them in by the due date, along with the revised participant list.

Final participant list

The **original** consent forms for each participant and the leader’s acceptance form, must be sent in by the date given by your Regional Coordinator. The Regional Coordinator will type the participant and group leader information from the forms into the program database to create a participant list.

This information will be used to print the youth and leaders’ travel tickets. Make sure the names are the full legal names as shown on the participants’ identification and that the information

matches the consent forms. The Regional Coordinator will send you a copy of the participant list to review it and check that all names are spelled correctly and match their legal name on ID.

After purchasing tickets, airlines charge a fee for changing the spelling of a name on a ticket. Costs incurred for name changes will be invoiced to your school or organization.

Send one copy of the list to the school principal or head of the group's organization. Take a copy with you when travelling.

If someone has to drop out

Once the final participant list is submitted, groups are responsible for the cost of any changes.

There are cases when someone has to drop out, usually due to circumstances beyond their control. The YMCA, on a case-by-case basis, will determine if the cause is sufficient. Tell the YMCA immediately of any participant who will not or did not travel so that the financial impact of the lost ticket can be minimized. If you do not inform the YMCA within a reasonable time, the group will be responsible for the lost funds, despite the circumstances.

The YMCA does not generally approve replacing individuals after the final participant list has been submitted. As the exchange program involves building relationships prior to travel, adding participants jeopardizes this process. Also, it often costs the program more for travel. Name changes are considered individually. If they are accepted, the group may be responsible for any additional costs charged by the airline. Groups may be required to pay these costs directly to the travel agent.

Dismissing a participant

At the leader's discretion, a participant will be dismissed in situations where:

- The participant possesses or has consumed alcohol or illegal or harmful substances
- The participant's intentional behavior puts them or others in physical or emotional risk.

The parents or guardians will be responsible for any costs. The YMCA's travel agent will arrange the participant's return home. Please note that YMCA health and safety procedures typically require a guardian be asked to come and receive a dismissed youth. If this is not possible, a group leader will be asked to chaperone the youth back to their home community. The cost of this ticket will also be the responsibility of the parents/guardians.

Hold an Information Night

A YMCA Youth Exchange involves parents/guardians, the school or sponsoring association, and community members. It is as much a learning experience for the broader community as for the participants. Including local business and community leaders in the planning can benefit you because they can help with fundraising, donations, and publicity and opening doors for participants. Invite everyone to a meeting.

Have a space where you can explain the process and goals of the exchange and where everyone has a chance to ask questions. Discuss and agree on how these people will participate and how you will keep them informed as the planning gets underway. Make sure parents/guardians are comfortable with the level of commitment required of them (hosting the twin, financial costs, fundraising, etc.)

Working with parents/guardians

Enlist parents/guardians' support for the various activities—fundraising, collecting information, publicity, making community contacts. Make sure you regularly invite parents/guardians to the planning meetings.

Reassure parents/guardians about your responsibility and accountability. Share with them your background and professional or training experience.

And, make sure you discuss the safety procedures you will follow while travelling.

Working with your twin leader

As much as an exchange is a learning experience for youth, it's also a challenging experience for group leaders. To get the most out of it, here's what other group leaders have recommended.

Be aware

Be aware that you may have different leadership styles. It may take time to adjust to each other.

Don't assume

Be careful not to assume. Check out all details for the exchange program, all your assumptions for group participation and attitudes during the visit, all potential expenses and who will be paying for what.

Communicate - call and e-mail!

Regular contact throughout the planning process, at fixed intervals, is a must. Set up regular calling times.



Our youth committee suggests that you

- Have the youth define goals, behavioural expectations and the ways in which they want to be involved, once they have permission to participate
- Develop your own youth committee to help with the planning
- Have youth assist at or run the meetings for parents/guardians.

Role of the group leader

The group leader

- Chooses the group members and makes sure each is matched with a participant from the twin group.
- Makes sure the host families are screened.
- Promotes interaction among group members.

Organizes for the group

- Leads members in planning and implementing the orientation, host program and follow-up phases.
- Organizes the evaluation process.
- Helps group members develop leadership and interpersonal skills.
- Advises group members to carry adequate travel insurance.
- Is aware of any medical issues.

Travels with the group

- Participates in and supervises the group while visiting the twin community.
- Has a plan to deal with medical or other emergencies.
- Works with members to resolve personal and group difficulties that arise.
- Promotes interaction among members of both groups.
- Links the group with the YMCA Exchange office and stays in regular contact with their Regional Coordinator.

Makes arrangements

- Completes all required forms, including the group leader evaluation form.
- Receives all travel documents from the travel agent.

Role of the group members

Participants

- Participate in all phases of the exchange: planning, traveling and hosting, following up, share ideas and suggestions.
- Bring commitment and energy to the exchange process.

Your participants can contribute to building their own group. The level at which they participate will depend on their abilities, but also how you involve them in the planning process.

Role of the parents/guardians

Parents and guardians of the participants, to whatever extent they can.

- Encourage group members to take part in all phases of the exchange
- Provide a safe, welcoming place and appropriate supervision for twin group members
- Participate in fundraising and other exchange activities.

Role of the YMCA

Staff in the YMCA Exchange office and your Regional Coordinator

- Co-ordinate the exchange, including all travel to and from the twin community, and assist your group in finding a twin.
- Support group leaders by answering questions and providing written materials.
- Link each exchange to the national network.

Explore cultural differences

As no two people are exactly the same, and cultural differences exist in virtually all groups. Your group should become more aware of differences within it even before they explore the differences between the two groups. Activities like creating safe space, (page 64), crossing the line (page 74), holding a values auction (page 71), and conflict resolution (page 68) can help. Your group can discuss topics such as expectations about touching, hugging, direct eye-contact or differences in religious beliefs, food, or communications methods. You may want to repeat some of these activities when the two groups are together.

It's a good idea to create safe space with your group (page 64) early in the process so that everyone feels comfortable and participates. You can repeat the exercise when the two groups first come together.

One benefit of the exchange is the bonds that develop between the members of your group and their "twins." For this to happen, participants need to recognize that there may be differences, be prepared to understand them and to be patient, respectful and prepared to resolve conflicts if they arise. Participants need to feel comfortable working across language and cultural differences.

Match twins

Past exchanges prove that a strong twin relationship is key to the success of the exchange.

Two approaches have worked particularly well for YMCA Exchange groups: twinning on interests and "buddying."

Usually, you twin on the basis of age and shared interests, hobbies, and activities.

Participants fill out profiles describing their expectations and interests. They can include their favourite pastimes, sports, and music. The profile also asks if they have pets or any allergies or special medication or dietary needs.

Buddying works well for some groups where there are differences in age or strong language barriers or distinctly different community lifestyles. You may want to pair twins so that one can support the other if one is likely to have a particularly challenging time during the visit. Please make sure you discuss this with your twin leader as it may not be possible in all areas to accommodate this type of twinning.

Instead of a written profile, you could send your twin group a video profile of each group member. Some youth have used websites and social networking platforms.

Another language

If you're involved in a bilingual exchange, know each participant's ability to speak and understand the other language. It's particularly important for twins and their families to know this before the exchange.

Getting to know your twin

“I would recommend being in contact with your twin before you arrive. It will give you a chance to get to know them better so you will have something to talk about and be comfortable with each other.”

Write

Spend time corresponding—e-mail, social media, text, mail. Ideally, twins should write to each other several times, describing school, family life, favourite sports and hobbies, the languages they speak. Remember that not everyone may have access to e-mail so it may be more effective to send “snail mail”.

Photo

Some groups like to send a photo of each member. It’s a good idea to discuss photos, reminding your group that stereotypes, biases and assumptions can easily be drawn from pictures. The group may decide to exchange photos, formally or informally, or not to exchange pictures at all and have fun picking out their partner when the twin group arrives.

Video

Make a video of your group at a planning meeting or a fundraising event, and send to your twin group. This gives your twin a look at your group “in action.”

Postcards

For groups that aren’t letter-writers, try postcards. Ask the group to write on a postcard one thing they would want their twin to know about them and one thing about their community.

Preparing parents/guardians

It’s just as important to prepare parents/guardians and families as it is to prepare your group members. If your exchange is an intercultural one, parents/guardians can also experience culture shock.

At a planning meeting, talk about how host families can provide a good experience for their twin. Discuss host family responsibilities and some activities the family can do with their visitor. Talk about what kind of supervision they are expected to give.

How the home works

With the parents/guardians, develop a list of topics that should be addressed as soon as the twin arrives. Below are topics that could be covered in many homes. Which would be appropriate to go over with a youth from your twin group?

- Washing clothes
- Preparing and cleaning up after meals and snacks
- Using internet, phone, television, radio
- Using kitchen and appliances
- Meal times and food choices
- Observing religious or family practices

Contact the twin's parents/guardians

Some parents/guardians find it helpful and reassuring to introduce themselves to the twin parents/guardians before the exchange. Parents/guardians can telephone, write, or, particularly if there are language differences, send photographs of themselves and other family members.

If a parent/guardian is very concerned, you can contact your YMCA Regional Coordinator for advice or have an experienced exchanges parent/guardian call your concerned parent/guardian to answer any questions.

Remind your parents/guardians

Tell your parents/guardians that, if things get tough, not to blame anyone (including themselves). Their visitor is facing a new family which is possibly very different from their own. It may be the first time the visitor's been away from home. Parents/guardians need to be patient and supportive. Refer to page 14 in the Host Guide for methods on how to deal with homesickness.

Strategies for dealing with "newness": a new province, language, culture

Watch, look, listen

Make full use of observation skills. Look for patterns in behaviour, keeping in mind that everyone is an individual and it can be easy to misinterpret a pattern. Be careful about making generalizations, both positive and negative. Use "I" statements, like "I have observed..." or "I feel that..." instead of "They do ..." or "We all like..."

Try things out

Ask questions. Learn some new vocabulary. Build friendships. Know that you'll make mistakes—and that's fine.

Notice reactions—yours and theirs

Keep a journal. Write a letter. Don't worry about "understanding" everything. It doesn't have to make sense.

Find a "comfort zone"

Do an activity that is comfortable and familiar once a day. Talk about your reactions with other group members. Write in your journal.

Laugh—as much as and as often as you can

Adapted from G. Ball, YMCA Geneva Park Centre

Develop your group's contract

It's important for all group members to develop and agree to a set of expectations about participation and behaviour when they are both hosting and visiting the twin community. You can include parents/guardians in this discussion.

Your group contract will have sections on behaviour, attitudes, participation and life in their own and twin home. On page 67 are some sample suggestions for participants staying in a twin home.

Behaviour

Use the exercise on creating a safe space and expectations for behaviour on pages 63 and 64. There is also a list of suggestions for staying with a host.

Attitudes

What individual attitudes are important on an exchange? (friendliness, open-mindedness etc.)

Participating

What are expectations for participating in activities? (enthusiasm, attentiveness, etc.)

Life in the twin home

How will you handle differences (meal times, curfew or no curfew, getting up earlier or later, going to church or not)? What manners are expected? Do you bring a host gift (a small gift from your community) to thank the host family? What do you do if you're sick or unhappy?

Suggested guidelines for behaviour

Participants must:

- Attend all events.
- Be open to trying new things, foods, and activities.
- Stay safe—use the buddy system and stay together.
- Try to have a proposed solution when they present a problem.
- Be prepared to expect the unexpected.

Time together

During the time they spend together, your group experiences the twin community and sees their own community through new eyes.

Each exchange is unique. Here are some comments from group leaders about visiting their twin.

It takes a while

"Coming from a small, isolated town, the students have limited experience travelling and meeting new people. At times they were nervous, uncomfortable and reluctant to participate in some activities that were unfamiliar to them. It took them a little while to feel at home with their twin. By the end of the trip many of these difficulties had been overcome."

Thank you postcards

“While in Nova Scotia, our students sent post cards to the organizations that hosted our visitors while in Yellowknife. These cards were thank-yous for helping us to host a successful visit, and we felt that it would be very nice for them to receive a card from us while we were away.”

Thank you in second language

“When our group was at an event, we asked one of the visiting students to thank, in their second language, the host on behalf of the group and to present a small gift (for example, a pin or book about their region.)”

The unexpected part of the experience

“Even if, during the exchange, there are sometimes unexpected incidents, it’s part of ‘real’ life and learning.”

Visiting your twin

Keep a daily journal

A record of thoughts and impressions can become the basis for discussions about the trip during follow-up activities. Each person can keep a journal, or the group can create one journal by arranging for one person to be responsible for each day of the visit. Or use Thoughts and Feelings about the exchange experience, on page 77, as a guide to draw up your own form.

Daily check-ins

Touch base for 10 to 15 minutes at the beginning and the end of the day. This gives everyone the chance to talk about any problems or concerns that might have come up. Check-ins also allow participants to reflect on what they did during the day.

Make sure that your group members are able to contact you at all times in case of questions or problems.

When you return home, meet with your group

How did you like it? What didn’t you like? How was the twinning? Check if group members need to talk about some situations that came up before meeting the twin group again. If your group travelled first, review arrangements for hosting the twin group.

Send a thank you letter to your twin

A personal thank you letter from each of your group members to their twin is an excellent way to show their appreciation. It also helps to maintain connections after the exchange ends.

Hosting your twin

One group had a handout of what group members should remember when their twin group was visiting. Here's what they suggested:

- Ask your twin many times during the day if they are hungry, tired, comfortable, if they need or want anything. Make them feel at home.
- Introduce them to all your other friends and family
- Tell them as much as you know about your home town
- Go to the group leader if you feel any problems developing
- We have many activities planned – please be available to help set up, clean up, or do whatever is required to make things run smoothly
- Have a good time!

When your twin group leaves, meet with your group and parents/guardians

How did you like it? What didn't you like? How do hosting families feel about the experience? If your group hosted first, go over your final travelling arrangements.

3. Planning the Exchange

Every exchange has a strong educational focus and a balanced program of activities. These activities, done during the planning process, the hosting and visiting, and after the exchange, encourage interaction and group-building.

Set your objectives

At your first meeting, review the outline and objectives of the Youth Exchanges Canada Program. Then start to work with the group to identify key learning objectives that fit the program and relate to their home community.

You may need to provide some suggestions. On page 61-62 is a list of questions you can use with the group to help develop the objectives.

Examples of learning objectives:

- Becoming more aware of local environmental issues
- Raising awareness of social justice issues such as homelessness
- Learning about food security and poverty
- Focusing on gender sensitivity and diversity education
- Learning how the arts can promote social issues
- Learning about the agricultural sector

With the group, decide on a maximum of three learning objectives that they are excited about. Share the learning objectives with the twin group. During the planning, it may be possible for a group to adapt their learning objectives to create a stronger link with the twin community.

Plan activities

After you have the learning objectives, your group can begin to plan related activities for the pre- exchange period and the hosting period.

The group may develop subcommittees to research community members, groups, and events that relate to the learning objectives. This may be best achieved through projects tied to the curriculum of the school or organization.

Activities could be participating in community events, fundraising, visits to historic, cultural, and economic or government sites, a farm, recycling plant or science centre, having guest speakers, or spending time with the host family members and community members. Activities that promote interaction with the exhibits are often more effective, fun and popular than straight tours. Each activity must enable one of the learning objectives and list indicators that show how the activity meets the objectives.

The group then considers all the potential activities and decides which they would like to do. They should consider the cost, interest, timing, risk, practicality, and potential for

collaborating with community members. The group should also include post-exchange activities so that they can share and reflect on their exchange experience.

Consider these factors in your planning

Interaction

Exchange activities that lead to mixing and interaction help each participant get to know their twin as well as other group members and their twin parents. Some groups may need “space” at first. You and your twin group leader can discuss how you will approach this before the groups meet. It may require extra effort from both of you to help the groups interact.

Community engagement

Participating in regular local activities helps give your group a good overview of the community. Join a community cleanup, attend a local opening, meet with social service agencies.

Volunteer projects – like volunteering at a Senior’s Centre or Food Bank – are excellent opportunities for youth to explore social issues and gain valuable skills and experiences. Each exchange must incorporate 8 hours of volunteer work into each leg of the exchange.

Plan to reduce risk

Identify activities that have an element of risk. If your group is planning an excursion that involves boats, snowmobiles, horseback riding or any equipment that could be a risk, discuss it with your twin leader well in advance. If you’re going swimming, for example, you must have a lifeguard. Some of these activities may require parents to sign waivers, which you will need to collect.

Reflection

Building on the sense of group trust developed through the planning process, check regularly (formally or informally) on how the group is doing and what they are thinking and feeling. You could touch base briefly at the end of the day with your group or provide opportunities for both groups to talk together.

Seeing the local reality

The primary objective of an exchange is to get a sense of a community that could not be gained from a tourist experience. Include activities that are new to both the hosting and visiting groups. Ask group members, parents or grandparents to be guides for any local tours. Consulting community resources can help you identify new and interesting activities that are often free. Please note that bus or special tours may need to be arranged well in advance.

Time with hosts

This is when the twins really get a sample of life in their new community. If your group is doing a common stay you might still be able to arrange for twins to spend time with their twin’s families, you

will however need to conduct family references if this is your plan. Family activities should include ordinary events and not just special ones.

Include at least one event in which parents/guardians and family members participate. Pot luck suppers are a favourite.

Accessibility

If your exchange includes youth with disabilities, make sure local transportation, buildings you plan to visit, and the host living quarters are accessible.

Find a politician

Involve the politicians (your mayor, councillor, band chief, provincial or federal Member of Parliament). Ask them to host a reception, participate in a welcoming ceremony, arrange a tour of the town hall, provincial or territorial legislature, or speak to your group about the issues that are important to your community. To find out about your MP go to www.parl.gc.ca.

Recreation

Plan one physical activity for each day. If you are planning a number of outdoor activities, have alternatives ready in case of bad weather. Recreational activities unrelated to the learning objectives should not exceed 20 per cent of the time, for example, one day of a five-day exchange.

Free time

Build in some free time throughout the plan where youth can spend time with their twin. Some twins use this time for shopping. The amount of time depends on the maturity of both groups and on your community. Keep in mind that you are still responsible for group members during free time.

Shows

A highlight of several exchange programs is an opportunity for the visiting group, or both, to give a demonstration of their culture to the local community. Talent nights, cultural performances and demonstrations allow groups to showcase various music, dance, clothing, slide shows, films and pictures.

Homework

If the youth are missing school, they'll need time to do homework.

Pacing

If a time change is involved, plan fewer activities at the beginning so that visitors can adapt. By day three or four, fatigue may set in, so plan lighter activities.

The more involvement youth have with designing a host plan, the more ownership they will take for the exchange experience.



Our youth committee suggests that you:

- Have participants describe what they normally do in a day. Use these ideas as a basis for showing your twin what life is like in your community.
- Use a short list of ideas and have youth research costs to help choose activities.
- Take a vote. See what the most popular ideas are and balance them with financial resources and safety considerations.
- Keep hosting activities within a modest budget.
- Have participants plan the finer details.

Post-exchange

In your plan include the list of activities the group plans to do after the travelling and hosting, along with a description of how they link to the program objectives.

This section of the plan will include thank you, evaluation activities and ways to keep up the connections with the twin group.



All participants need to be involved in their exchange experience. Discuss this with your group and let them decide what items they can take responsibility for. See the engaging youth section on page 7.

4. Travelling and billeting arrangements

Make billeting arrangements

Going through the screening process and keeping up regular contact with the parents/guardians of your group members makes it easy for you to reassure your twin leader that the homes for the twins will be adequate and safe. It also reassures your group's parents/guardians to know that the twin group's parents/guardians are going through the same screening process. You will need to provide your Regional Coordinator with a Billeting List at least two weeks prior to hosting.

Please check with your school board or organizations policies on billeting prior to speaking to your twin.

If a common stay is required based on the family needs please make sure that you are aware of the options in your area and when they are available.

Template provided on the Group Leader website (www.yecgl.net)

What if?

It's a good idea to have a plan in case unforeseen problems come up with the billets. Discuss this with your twin leader ahead of time.

Please note that **ONLY** families that have been screened and approved may host a youth. If an alternate arrangement needs to be made, the new family will have to undergo the host screening process including reference checks **PRIOR** to moving the youth participant. As well, under no circumstances can a youth leave the group and spend time with a relative without prior consent and arrangements being made and the YMCA notified.

Leaders billet

Leaders usually choose to stay in each other's homes as well. Discuss it with the other leaders in your group and with your twin to make sure everyone is clear about the arrangements. You may need to prepare your family to host.

Screen host families

Every participant has the right to stay in a safe and secure environment. For this reason, all participants and host families must take part in a screening process. This includes Group Leaders or any other chaperones that will be hosting youth in their home.

Group Leaders are expected to ensure reference checks are done with the utmost respect for the families and their privacy while gaining enough assurance that the family will be a suitable host.

Getting all the forms filled out and doing reference checks can be a big task. You may want to set up a screening committee.

Screening committee

Two or three other responsible people can help you call references, do the paperwork, visit homes if needed and help you determine whether a host family is suitable. The committee members must agree to keep all the information confidential.

Reasons for denial

Do not accept a family to host if, during your calls, you find reference to any kind of child abuse, violent behavior, alcohol or drug problems or inappropriate behavior or living conditions. You should be prepared to set up a review process for those who might want to question an unfavorable decision.

Steps for screening

1. Ask the parents to fill out the Family References (Form 4) when they fill out the Participant's Consent and Contract (Form 1).
2. Using the Interviewing references sheet (Form 5), contact all three of the four references for every family.
3. If you think it will help you make a decision, interview the host family at home.
4. Notify the family of your decision. If you decide they are unsuitable to host, notify them in writing but do not give any explanation. We've included a sample denial letter.
5. Complete all the paperwork and keep it safely locked away.
6. Sign the Leader's Acceptance form (Form 2) to confirm that you have screened all the host families and send it to the YMCA Exchange office.

Sample letter of denial of host family

Here's a sample letter for you to use if you find during the screening that you have to refuse a host. A template of this letter is available on the website (www.yecgl.net).

Dear (Name),

YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada recognizes that the conduct of host families must be of an exemplary nature as they are in a position of trust. For this reason, we formally screen all potential host families. Our high standards continue to make YMCA programs safe and successful for young people. As a result of the screening process, your application, along with others, to be a host family for a YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada Program has been reviewed. We regret to inform you that you were not among those who were selected.

Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

(name of group leader)

Common stay arrangements

Your group may be involved in a common stay arrangement, either as part of the host plan, such as a camping trip or group sleepover, or one that is needed to remove barriers to participation. (See Special Measures, page 6.)

Common stays are usually in school dorms, camps or hostels. In general, hotels are not considered because they are expensive and accessible to the public. Also, you have less control over who stays in the hotel.

Before the YMCA will approve common stay arrangements, you have to provide:

- A description of the location, including the facilities, their layout and any risks such as unsupervised pools, lakes or places with liquor licenses. Include a brochure or other print material if possible.
- A list of measures that will ensure the safety of the group members, including how they are to be allocated rooms; supervision protocols, particularly after hours; and procedures to minimize risks.

If you are going to be involved in a common stay, discuss it early with your Regional Coordinator. You will receive a Common Stay Information form to fill out and return. This form can be found on the Group Leader website. (www.yec.gl.net) Your twin leader will also have to sign the form, to ensure there has been clear communication about the arrangement.

If the common stay is part of a request for special measures, you submit the form along with the initial common stay letter and a quote for costs.

Check what you need to pack

To make sure your group knows what to pack, ask your twin leader to send you a list of essentials for your visit. Make a similar list for your twin leader. Recommend that each person take only one piece of luggage and one carry-on bag. Each piece should be tagged with name and address.

Your last planning meeting before you travel

Topics to cover:

- Airplane—expected behaviour, security checks (importance of not joking about drugs or terrorism), what not to pack or carry on, new airline rules, staying together
- Hotel—if staying overnight en route—expected behaviour, acceptable noise levels, importance of not leaving the hotel.
- Carrying an emergency address and phone number slip and emergency money in wallet.

Check whether it's the first plane trip for any of your group members. You may want to keep an extra eye on them.

For the trip

Make sure you have the following:

- Emergency funds and phone numbers
- Medication for pain relief and to control nausea
- Food or money to buy a meal
- Spare snacks for travel delays.

For a young group

If your group is young or quite nervous, arrange a time for parents/guardians to speak with their youth shortly after they arrive or when they reach their host families. This can help them adjust.

Make sure all group members and parents/guardians have a copy of the host agenda, telephone numbers of the host and the emergency plan. Parents/guardians should be able to reach you and your twin group at all times during the exchange.



Meet with your participants to discuss at what level they need to be involved. Some groups may be able to look after many of the tasks in this section. Others may have one or two items they would be able to take on.

5. Money matters

You and your group will have to decide how much you'll need to spend—and raise—for the exchange.

Developing the budget with your twin leader

Who pays for what?

Before you draw up your budget, discuss it and make some decisions with your twin leader. Decide how each host program will be funded. Check out how meals, local transportation, entrance fees, and special activities will be covered in the host community. Make sure there is clear agreement as to which group is responsible for what. Most groups decide they will fund all the activities when the twin group visits. Your host plan however, should not drive your fundraising goals. Your fundraising should drive what you are able to plan.

When both groups are together, transport costs and admission fees can add up

Participant fees

Participant fees are a group fee based on \$70 per member. The total for fees should be part of your overall fundraising plan. If this amount is a barrier, talk with your Regional Coordinator.

Make it out to YMCA of Greater Toronto

Send the total for fees as a cheque or money order made out to the **YMCA of Greater Toronto** with the other required paperwork to your Regional Coordinator by your due date.

If you require an invoice please see the GROUP LEADER WEBSITE. www.yecgl.net

Financial Report

Once you've got a good idea what your budget will be, fill in the Financial Report and Estimate of Participant Hours. Forms can be found on the website (<http://www.yecgl.net>) in the Exchange Plan and should be submitted electronically to your Regional Coordinator.

Spending money for participants

Do you want to provide spending money for your group, so that each member has the same amount to spend when visiting your twin group? This makes sure that no group member is at a disadvantage and that parents/guardians with limited resources don't feel pressured to contribute.

If members are bringing their own money, agree on an amount. One option is to ask participants to surrender all their spending money. Change it into small bills, place it in an envelope with the name and amount of money in it and play banker, perhaps distributing it every second day.

Be aware of the financial circumstances of each group member. If one member has less money, it will affect the group atmosphere. The best way for the group to handle spending money will depend on the age and maturity of the group members and your destination.

Be sensitive about your twin group’s economic situation. What may be feasible in one community may be impossible in another. It’s important for both you and your twin to feel comfortable with the amount spent in both communities.

As youth are involved with the host plan, they can also help develop the budget. Participants should be involved in the decisions about spending money. This way, they will be more willing to help with fundraising and have a better sense of the costs.



Our youth committee suggests that:

- Youth can be involved in budgeting.
- Youth can research the costs of planned activities.
- Youth can alter the host plan to meet financial constraints.

Decide where the money will come from

How much money will come from fundraising through special events? Corporate sponsorship? Donations? School board? Service clubs?

In the example, based on their expenses, the group will need to raise \$3,180. How much can you reasonably expect to raise? Remember that your fundraising should be driving your exchange plan, and not the other way around.

Events	
Dance	\$750
Baked goods sale	250
Bingos	430
Raffle	1000
Corporate Donations	
Community Service Club	250
Fernanda’s Jewellery Store	100
The Corner Store	50
Jamieson’s Card and Gift Store	50
Individual Donations	
Sylvie “Bank Manager”	100
Jay “Friend of Sylvie”	100
Wendy “Aunt of Participant”	100
Total from Fundraising	\$3,180

Worst case	\$ _____
Realistic	\$ _____
Ideal	\$ _____

On average, for every \$100 you want to raise, you will need to spend \$20. You may want to add 20 per cent to your fundraising goal.

Funding for Special Measures

The Special Measures Client Fund offers many groups that face barriers to participation the opportunity to experience a reciprocal exchange.

Groups are expected to pay as much as possible of their special measures costs through their own fundraising. Often groups can only raise enough to cover their local travel and activities.

Generally, these measures may be eligible for funding:

- Extra leaders—for younger groups and groups that need more support. Each request is considered on its own merits.
- Alternative housing—if possible, consider billeting first because it allows participants to develop a stronger understanding and friendship with their twin. It also ensures a higher degree of supervision. During a common stay a few leaders are responsible for the entire group. Sometimes, however, billeting is not possible. If so, requests for common stays are evaluated to see if hosting is a barrier. Your Regional Coordinator can give you details and tell you how to apply for a common stay. (See also pages 6, 27.).
- Modified vehicles.
- Interpreters, guides and special assistants.

All requests are considered individually, according to the group's needs. If a challenge exists that is a barrier to participation, additional funding may be provided.

What is not funded:

- Substitute teachers.
- Cost of local activities.
- Local transportation unless it creates a barrier to participation.
- Meals while travelling.

Applying for Special Measures funding-

Please speak to your Regional Coordinator about the timing of your request

Funding must be approved before travel.

Contact your Regional Coordinator to discuss your needs as soon as you become aware that this might be an issue. Submit requests by the date given by your Regional Coordinator. Past this date, the chances of funding decrease significantly.

Unapproved expenses during the exchange will not be covered unless there is an emergency or a situation that compromises participants' safety.

Fundraising is a contact sport

Besides raising money for exchange activities, organizing and holding fundraising events helps develop community awareness of the exchange.

Creativity—using all available options—is the key to successful fundraising.

Face-to-face

People give to people, not to organizations.

Meeting face-to-face gets better results than sending a letter. If you do send a letter, follow it up one week later with a phone call.

Be specific

When asking for donations, state the amount you'd like.

Asker must be a donor

The person asking for money must have given money or be involved in fundraising activities with the group.

20/80 rule

Twenty per cent of the donors will give you 80 per cent of the money.

It's fun!

Fundraising = funraising + friendraising = fun.

You know what your expenses are. You know how much you have to raise. Now you have to choose the method or methods that you feel comfortable with and that will work in your community.

Friendraise

You can ask a community leader, a local business, or a service club for money—Friendraise.

Start by holding a meeting with people involved with your exchange: participants, parents/ guardians, teachers, school or administration officials. This meeting should have two goals: developing a list of

contacts and developing your “case”, what you will tell your contacts about your exchange when you meet them.

Identify your friends

Identify who would be a good person to ask for a donation. Each of these contacts is a possible Friend. Brainstorm until you have a list of at least 20.

Try friends, relatives, colleagues, parents’/guardians’ and leaders’ business connections.

Do the participants in your group eat at the same restaurant? Does your association give all its business to the same printer? Does everyone use the same corner store? These are all ready-made Friends.

Who does what?

Decide who will get a face-to-face meeting with a group member. Ideally, two people should call on a Friend—a group leader or parent and a participant. And, one of you should know the Friend.

Decide who will receive a letter, and follow it up with a phone call.

Set up a schedule, and decide who will meet with each contact or who will write the letter. Please see the Group Leader Website for a sample letter and fact sheet.

Set a deadline for people to make their contacts and assign yourself the responsibility of checking that everyone can make the deadline. Checking back keeps everyone on track and keeps you up to date on how the Friendraising is going.

Making your case—telling your story

When you meet with your Friend, or write a letter, you will want to say what your exchange is about, what it will accomplish, and what kind of donation you would like. This is called presenting your case, but it’s really telling your story.

Mission

State your mission or objective:

- Be specific and clear
- Say what your exchange objectives are
- State you are part of the YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada Program.

Example:

We are a youth group of 20 planning an exchange trip to Regina. Our exchange is sponsored by the Government of Canada through the YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada Program. We are going on the exchange to learn more about Canada and youth volunteer projects.

Benefits

Describe the benefits to your group and to your community, and how you will achieve your objective:

- The group will learn about another culture and a different part of Canada by staying with host families.
- The twin group will visit your community.

Example:

Our group will be staying a week in Regina, in the homes of hosts. Many activities are planned for us. In May, we will host our twins. They will have a chance to learn about our community- and we are planning to show them all that our community has to offer.

Budget

Tell them about your budget:

- Be specific and clear
- Include the amount of funding you are receiving through the program and the total you expect to raise.

Example:

Our budget is \$18,330. Our travel costs of \$16,000 are being paid through the YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada Program, funded by the Government of Canada. We are planning to raise \$1,600 from special events, like a teen dance, car washes and raffle, and we hope to raise the remainder from people like you. This money will be used to showcase our community to our twins from Regina.

Ask

Tell your friend what you want.

Ask for the donation directly and specifically.

Example: A donation of \$200 will help us take our guests to the local museum.

Putting your story together

Put the “mission”, “benefits”, “budget” and “ask” together and you have a one-page story to use for all your fundraising activities.

Other ways to ask

Challenge Grant

You can set up a Challenge Grant. In this challenge, a person or organization donates to your group and challenges other people or organizations to match it.

Challenges can result in some friendly competition, raising both enthusiasm and money.

“Tom’s Gas n Wash will give the _____ Association Youth Exchange 50 cents for every car washed during the week of _____ when the driver says ‘I support the YMCA Youth Exchange.’”

“Leaside High challenges Brookside to a fundraising dance marathon.”

In-kind

You can also ask for help that’s “in-kind.” Businesses or even community groups may find it easier to donate goods or a service instead of money. Make up a list of items or services you need.

Negotiate free entrance or reduced rates to tourist attractions. If you are planning a raffle, ask for TVs, camcorders, cameras, sculptures, airline tickets, etc.

Examples

In Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, a local tour company provided a free guided tour of the city the first day of the exchange.

In Vancouver, B.C., the Canadian Armed Forces provided warm clothing and sleeping bags for a trip to the Northwest Territories.

In Rockyford, Alberta, the Lions Club made their chuckwagon available for a pancake breakfast fundraising event.

Funraise

You can hold a special event—Funraise.

What type?

Some fundraising activities are more successful in some communities than others. Think about successful events that other groups have organized and what made them work. The “tried and true” ideas are the best fundraising ideas; you don’t have to be creative.

Check if parents/guardians can provide fundraising opportunities through their work place.

Who?

How much commitment do group members need? Parents/guardians? Others?

Having the whole group participate in fundraising helps develop a team spirit and sense of purpose. Be realistic about the time required to organize an activity and the time your group has available.

How much?

Talk to others who’ve run similar events to help set a realistic goal. Draw up a list of your expenses so that you know how much you are spending to make your target. (The event that raises the most money is the event where all labour and items are donated.)

Unless you’ve run this event before, double the amount of organizing time you think you’ll need.

Make sure it’ll work

You’ll have a much better chance for success if you can say yes to the following:

- My group is enthusiastic about this event and prepared to take the time to make it successful,
- The time needed to organize and run this event matches the time my group has,
- This event lets group members talk about why they are participating in the exchange.

Hints for a successful event

Bite-sized job:

If you will be recruiting volunteers, make the job specific and bite-sized.

Collect in advance:

If you're running a "thon," ask people to collect money as they get sponsors. They're likely to be more successful than if they have to go back to collect on a pledge.

License:

Check to see if you need a lottery or any other kind of license.

Be realistic:

Be realistic about your expectations. An event can fail because costs are too high, prices are too low, or not enough tickets get sold.

Competition?

Find out if any other organizations are holding similar events at the same time as yours.

A group from the YMCA of Greater Vancouver set up a fundraising committee when they were planning their exchange. These committee members, with some help from the group leader, made decisions about how money was to be spent and monitored the spending. This approach helped them practice their money management skills.

Fundraising ideas

Sales:

Arts and crafts, cords of wood, hot dogs, flowers, baked goods, popcorn, fair-trade chocolate, light bulbs, rummage or yard, cold food plate

Games:

Bingo games, 50-50 draws, loonie draws, raffles, casinos, pools: hockey, etc.

School or community events:

Pancake breakfasts, community lunches, ethnic or potluck dinners, bottle drives, movie night (with free popcorn), pie-throwing booth, community walking tours, dances, talent shows, car washes, charge for parking at association during major community events

Hire-a-youth projects:

Services auction, delivering flyers for local businesses, classroom teachers-aides, landscaping, working at canteens or concessions, telephone soliciting for charitable organizations

Pledges:

Garbage-a-thons, dance-a-thons

Contests:

Lip-sync or karaoke.

Keep a list of everyone who supports your exchange—people who give money or in-kind gifts and all volunteers. You must send thank-you letters to each one. Or your group could write personal notes.

You could also acknowledge donors and volunteers in a newsletter, newspaper ad or at a special event when your twin group is visiting.

Youth should play a major role in assisting or running the fundraising that is required for the exchange experience.



Our youth committee suggests that you:

- Have youth brainstormed ways to raise money (they will be more willing to help if they use their own ideas).
- Involve youth in asking a business for a donation as they can tell their own story.
- Have youth set a specific fundraising goal.
- Have the youth committee update the other youth members and school or community groups on the progress of the fundraising.
- Have youth write their own thank-you letters.

Sample letter for Friendraising

Dear Sylvie,
Manager,
Local Bank

Our school has been chosen to participate in YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada, which supports youth exchanges across Canada. Twenty youth will be going to Regina, Saskatchewan, to spend one week in the homes of their twin, and then 20 students from Regina will be spending one week here.

This is a wonderful educational opportunity, and the students have been preparing for a long time for this experience. They have been learning about the Regina community, corresponding with their twins, and we're now busy raising money! We plan to raise \$2,400 through a teen dance, bake sales, a raffle, and other activities. All the travel costs for both groups, about \$16,000, are covered by the Government of Canada through YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada. As the total cost of our exchange is \$16,000+ \$3,260, we hope to raise the remainder from people like you.

We believe this exchange has value for our whole community as all of us will be enriched by our visitors' visit. When our students come back from their stay in the west, they will share their experience with us, through a slide show and talks, at a public evening.

I am writing to request your financial support of our exchange. A gift of \$200 would go a long way to helping us reach our goal.

Enclosed is a YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada sheet for your information. I hope we can talk about our exchange at your convenience. I will telephone you next week to set up a time.

Your friend,

(Parent of an Exchange participant)

A template of this letter is available on the group leader website.(www.yecgl.net)

6. Community matters

Being part of the exchange means being part of your own community and of your twin community.

You and your group will have to find out more about the history and situation of your own community so your group can plan the best activities for your twin's visit. And you will also have to get practical information about your twin community so your group knows what to expect during your visit.

You will also want to develop community awareness and support for the exchange.

More meetings—orientation

Effective orientation begins the process of looking at the differences and similarities of both communities. Orientation sessions should spread out over several meetings.

Collect information about your own community

- Find out about festivals, youth conferences, and any other events scheduled for the time your group hosts. Newspapers are a good source, as is talking with people at social service organizations.
- Aside from the main tourist activities, find out what other things you can do, such as an historical walking tour, demonstration by an artisan, factory tour, university or college visit.
- Collect information for your twin. Contact local tourist and business associations, chambers of commerce, city halls and libraries. Collect newspapers. Check out websites.
- Ask an older resident or elder to talk about the history of your community.
- Make a slide-sound presentation combining photos and recorded sounds of your community. Or make a video profile.
- Share your perceptions. Does everyone agree on your community's size, history, major industries, resources? What are the differences of opinion?

Share the results

Send your twin group what you collect, or exchange videos.

Collect information about your twin community

- Ask your twin to send brochures and maps. After you've discussed the information or made copies, make an information bulletin board.
- Use films, books, videos. Ask the group to discuss what they learned about the twin community.
- Divide into small groups to examine specific areas of your twin community—the economic base, geography, climate, history, local government. You could narrow your focus to reflect your group's learning objectives.
- Depending on your group, you may want to approach research more academically. The geography of the twin community can be incorporated as a learning unit into a geography class, for example.

Share the results

Group members can describe their local history or economy, show a magazine picture of a local artist's work, paint a map and share music.

Compare and contrast

Compare and contrast the two communities:

- Climate
- Size—population and geographical
- Environment: industry, natural resources, local technologies, issues
- History—who founded the community? What is the ethnic make-up?
- Economy—what are the major sources of livelihood?

What are some other differences? And, what things do you have in common?

Contact the media

Send out a news release two weeks before the exchange. Follow it up with a phone call a few days before the event. Contact local newspapers, radio, television and television stations.

Talk to your local cable TV station. In an exchange involving a group from Iqaluit, NU, and Edmonton, AB, parents and community members were able to follow the students' exchange because the local television station filmed exchange activities.

Although it is generally easier to get media coverage in smaller communities, exchange groups have also been on the news in big urban centres. It depends on how interesting your exchange events are, how photogenic they are, and what else is in the news. Media often cover the volunteer service component of exchanges as they touch on relevant local issues. Perhaps having group members make some of the calls will pique media interest. (See sample news release on page 44)

Write articles

Write articles for community newspapers about your exchange. This has been known to produce donations.

Prepare a press kit

You can prepare a press kit, which should include

- Information about the group
- Information about their twin community
- Information about the YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada Program
- News release
- Host plan
- List of participants (first names only)
- Contact information.

Media tips

A news release should be double-spaced and no longer than two pages—one is better. Always include your name and telephone numbers as a contact person.

Online Platforms

You can create a larger following from your communities by using platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, or other blogging sites. These are great places to share photos and stories and to create a larger awareness of your exchange, your community and the program. Considering your online presence can also factor into your group fundraising efforts. Crowdfunding sites can be a great way to spread the word about your exchange, to raise funds and to engage your youth and your community (especially if your group works together to design creative rewards for your online donors).

Find us online at:



www.ymcaexchanges.com



www.Facebook.com/ymcaexchanges



www.Twitter.com/ymcaexchanges



www.Instagram.com/ymcaexchanges

Use the following hashtags and encourage youth to post about their exchange:

#YExplore= cool pictures of vistas and monuments, new places and landscapes.

#YConnect= pictures of friendship and team building activities.

#YEngage= pictures of community engagement day or Civic-related activities and topics.

#YExchanges= this is our general hash-tag for all of our Exchange activities.

***Tip:** Many exchange groups use create their own private Facebook groups to stay in touch before, during, and after the exchange. Please tell us about your group page, so that we can share your pictures with the community. You can also tag us in posts and use hashtags, so that we may identify each other. As with any communication to the public, make sure that you follow the tips below:

5W's

A news release must be written clearly and list all the necessary information to get attention. It must answer the 5W's: who, what, when, where, why.

Photos

Most newspapers look for interesting subjects to illustrate their stories. Include a schedule of events with your news release, so that the editor can see which ones will make good photo opportunities. You may even want to come up with an idea for a photogenic event.

Sample newsrelease

For Immediate Release Day,

Date, Year

(name of your group) to host visitors from (your twin groups community)

(Number) of youth from (your group) will be hosting (number of youth and name of your twin group) from (date of twin group visit) as part of their involvement in YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada Program.

YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada promotes cross-cultural awareness and a sense of belonging among Canadian youth aged 12 to 17. **Travel costs are funded by the Government of Canada through Exchanges Canada.**

The (name of your group and your twin group) will be participating in (name several activities — those worth a photo— with place, date and time)

YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada sponsors exchanges between two groups of same age and equal size in different communities. Each group hosts the other. During their stay in (name of your community), the youth will live with the families of their twin group.

Since 1976, thousands of young people have experienced the cultural and geographic diversity of Canada through participation in YMCA Youth Exchanges Program.

For more information: (your name and telephone number, day and evening) A template of this letter is available on the website.

www.yecgl.net

Contact community groups

Contact service clubs, chambers of commerce and business people. Ask the parents of the participants to talk about the exchange. Are any parents members of community groups that would be interested in getting involved in the exchange? “Involved” could mean helping you fundraise, making a financial contribution, or inviting your group to speak after the exchange.

Write the politicians

Let your Member of Parliament, mayor, councilor and provincial representative know about the exchange. (See letter on next page.)

To find out about your MP go to www.parl.gc.ca.



Youth can find many ways to let their own community know about the greatest experience they are planning. Our youth committee suggests that:

- Participants write an accompanying letter, from their perspective, to politicians or media to help promote the exchange
- Youth visit businesses and organizations to make them aware of the exchange.

All publicity must state that travel is funded by the Government of Canada through YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada

Sample letter to your Member of Parliament

You can send an edited version to your provincial or local representative.

*Mr./Ms (Name), M.P.
(Riding)
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6*

Dear (Name),

We are pleased to inform you that (name of your group) from your riding are taking part in a YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada program. During (your travel dates) our group will be guests in the (twin place) and in turn (twin travel dates) we host the (name of twin group).

YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada, funded by the Government of Canada through Exchanges Canada, promotes cross-cultural awareness and a sense of belonging among Canadian youth aged 12 to 17. Since 1976, thousands of young people have experienced the cultural and geographic diversity of Canada through participation in YMCA Youth Exchanges.

We are very proud to be part of this unique program and thank the federal government for making our exchange possible.

If you would like to contact us, we may be reached at (your address and phone number).

Sincerely,

(name of group leader)

A template of this letter is available on the website. (www.yecgl.net)

7. Keeping everyone safe

As leader, you are responsible for keeping your group members safe.

Insurance

Make sure your sponsor organization has enough liability insurance coverage for its own protection. You should do this **immediately** after your group is accepted, as it can take a while.

Ask your organization's administrator to contact the insurance provider and make sure that

- The liability policy covers the activities of the sponsor organization, its staff and group leaders for the duration of both sides of the exchange and has \$5,000,000 minimum coverage
- The policy has adequate limits and covers any out-of-city or out-of-province travel
- The Certificate of Insurance names the YMCA of Greater Toronto as an added insured with respect to the activities of the sponsor organization and its staff and leaders
- A copy of the certificate is sent to the YMCA by the due date.

You should also know the limits of your provincial or territorial health care coverage and see that the group members and their families also know.

Name YMCA on insurance certificate

Double check that your Certificate of Insurance names the **YMCA of Greater Toronto** as an additional insurer.

Supervising the group

You're responsible for supervising all group activities. Take an accurate head count at all departures. Make sure the host parents understand that they are expected to supervise their guests.

You will have to list your plans for supervision in the emergency plan that you must submit to your Regional Coordinator.

If your group is going to have a common stay, you will have to see that they are supervised in the "off" hours. Check with your Regional Coordinator and see page 27 for more information.

Use a buddy system

If you're a large group, use the "buddy system." This can help the two groups interact and saves you from having to count heads constantly.

Being accessible

All participants and parents must be able to reach the group leader or a contact person 24 hours a day during both parts of the exchange.

Keeping paper work and ID

Make sure that group members travel with government-issued identification and that there is a back-up photocopy of both sides of the document.

Give each participant and each family a copy of the itinerary and the host family's name or common stay, address and phone number before departure, as well as the 24-hour contact number.

Take a copy of the final participant list with you when you travel and leave a copy with the school principal or head of the organization.

Check medical needs

Be aware of any medication group members are taking, and make sure they have enough to last for the exchange. Make sure that you have their medical insurance numbers, including photocopies of their health cards, front and back, and are familiar with any medical needs.

If you're visiting a remote community, it's a good idea to forward information on special medical needs to the leader of your twin group. Many communities are served only by nursing stations, and the leader can then talk with staff at the station to make sure the appropriate medications are in stock.

Think about safety

If your group and your twin group come from very different environments, keep safety issues in the forefront. For example, riding a snowmobile or worrying about frostbite may be new to some participants living in southern Canada. Similarly, some groups from rural communities may have members who have never been on a subway or an escalator.

When you do your host plan, identify any activities that may involve risk and make a plan to reduce that risk. For example, if your group is going swimming, make sure you have a lifeguard.

Follow your own organization's guidelines when it comes to safety.

The YMCA expects all groups to reduce risk, ensuring exchanges are operated safely. The YMCA expects all groups to follow all applicable laws and regulations.

Have an emergency plan

You should be prepared to deal with any emergencies, medical or otherwise. Become familiar with YMCA procedures and with procedures your organization may have.

You will also have to prepare an emergency plan before the YMCA will make the group's travel arrangements. Talk with your Regional Coordinator about this. You will also want to work closely with your twin leader to develop both plans.

Many schools and organizations already have suitable plans that you can use.

An emergency plan includes:

- Contact numbers such as the travel rescue phone line and the YMCA 24-hour emergency number as well as each group's contact information.
- A statement that leaders have shared a copy of the emergency plan with each other and their participants' families.
- A list of who is responsible for the group at different times to give leaders and families clear Expectations.
- Details on how the group has prepared to deal with an emergency.
- How to deal with a lost participant.
- How to deal with an ill or injured participant.
- Group contract on behaviour

This plan is included in the Exchange Plan Document and is on the website. (www.yecgl.net)

Talk with your parents/guardians

Parents/guardians may have questions or concerns. At a meeting, go through the precautions you will be taking to ensure the group's safety. Mention any activities that might be considered risky.

Remind parents/guardians that they are expected to supervise their guest.

Fact Sheet: Planning for Safety

In vehicles

If your visitor is going to ride in or use an all-terrain vehicle, snowmobile, horse, motorcycle, car, truck, etc, make sure your visitor uses the proper safety equipment and the driver has a valid licence and insurance for that type of vehicle.

On the water

Anyone going water-skiing, on a boat or doing any other activity on water must wear a lifejacket. Before taking participants on water activities, discuss their level of swimming skills. A qualified lifeguard needs to be present. Make sure that any craft being used meets at least the minimum requirements for safety equipment.

Playing sports

An adult should supervise all sporting activities. Don't let participants undertake high-risk activities like rock climbing, running rapids, bungee jumping or sky-diving.

On the farm

If participants are staying on your farm, you should take them around and show them all the potential dangers. Instruct them carefully if you allow them to operate any machinery. (Any firearms should be locked away.)

In the city

If you are going to be using public transportation, review with your visitor the necessary safety precautions.

In a family emergency

If an emergency means a participant has to return home immediately, call the group leader.

In a health emergency

If a participant is injured, first get medical attention. Next, phone the group leader, who will have medical consent forms for the participant and be able to contact the parents.

Trouble-shooting

Contact numbers:

YMCA Exchanges after hours emergency line: 647-339-5926

YMCA Exchanges toll free number (business hours only): 1-877-639-9987

YMCA Exchanges Fax: 647-439-4502

UNIGLOBE after-hours phone: 1-800-206-1595. Quote SOS code 2DJ2.

The hotel can't find your reservation

Ask the desk clerk to re-check the reservation under the following:

- Exchanges Canada
- YMCA
- UNIGLOBE
- The name of your association or school.

Transportation delay

If you're delayed by weather or flight schedule changes contact the YMCA Exchange office or travel agency. We will authorize the hotel manager to extend your reservation. Eat your meals at the hotel and charge them to the room. UNIGLOBE's after-hours number is 1-800-206-1595. Quote SOS code 2DJ2.

Behaviour problems

Problems can be caused by many factors: homesickness, the freedom of the first time away from home, encounters with drugs and alcohol.

Prevention is key. Members sign the group contract, committing themselves to following through on expectations about behaviour and participation before going on the exchange. Sending a participant home early is a last resort.

If a group member has difficulties in the host's home, try to work out the problem with the participant and parents. An open discussion can sometimes help everyone involved become more comfortable with the arrangement.

Crisis at home while on exchange

A prearranged contact person should be available to receive calls in your community and relay messages to the other parents. Determine the seriousness of the crisis with the group member. If alternative travel arrangements are needed, call the Exchange office.

Sickness

In the event of illness or an accident, call the Exchange office (1-877-639-9987) or travel agency (1-877-771-7157) if you must arrange an early or postponed return for the individual or the group.

Emergency

In a crisis, you can reach the YMCA after business hours eastern time at 647-339-5926. Please use this number only in an emergency.

Reporting procedures

The YMCA has a formal contract with Exchanges Canada to deliver youth exchange programs. Within this agreement, the YMCA must inform Exchanges Canada, in a timely fashion, of any factor or event that may affect the program.

Some incidents or accidents may become public knowledge, or of interest to the media, or involve legal action, or parent complaints. Thus, the YMCA must be informed promptly of all accidents or incidents.

These elements will be included in your report to the YMCA Exchange office:

- group number
- group name
- type of incident or accident
- date of incident or accident
- location of incident or accident
- description of incident or accident
- actions taken by group leader and regional YMCA office
- general assessment.

If the incident or accident occurs outside normal working hours and it is serious, inform the YMCA immediately at the 24-hour emergency number (647-339-5926).

Exchanges Canada officials may require a written report. Make accurate notes of the incident as soon as possible. If the media is involved, you must submit the report the same day. You must also submit updated reports as information becomes available.

The Regional Coordinator or staff from the YMCA Exchanges office will help you.

The Accident/Incident Report is found on the Group Leader website. (www.yecgl.net)
Submit it, within 24 hours, to your YMCA Regional Coordinator.

Reporting abuse or neglect

Group leaders have a legal obligation to report abuse or neglect.

According to all provincial and territorial child protection acts, the responsibility for keeping our children and youth safe and free from abuse and neglect falls on all adults who play a role in the lives of children and youth, whether on sports fields, in classrooms, or within neighbourhoods.

Any person who has reasonable grounds to suspect that a child or youth may be suffering or may have suffered from emotional, physical abuse or neglect or sexual abuse must report the abuse or neglect to the local child protection agency. A person who has a duty to report shall make the report directly to the child protection agency and not rely on any other person to report on his or her behalf.

The Reporting Disclosures about Abuse or Neglect form is found on the Group Leader website (www.yecgl.net)

Submit it, within 24 hours, to your YMCA Regional Coordinator. See the Group Leader website for a fact sheet, *Protecting Yourself from Sexual Abuse*, for participants.

8. Getting the most from the Exchange

The exchange experience continues, even after the travelling and hosting are done. Follow-up activities and discussion allow the group members to focus their observations.

Evaluating the experience helps the YMCA and other groups plan their exchanges.

As a group

A few days after the second half of the exchange, hold a meeting to talk about the overall exchange experience. Use the journals or the completed Thoughts and Feelings activity on page 77 as the basis for comparing experiences.

Discuss how to record the trip for yourselves and how to best present your experience to your community. “Show and tell” your pictures and souvenirs. Involve the people and organizations you met with before the exchange. Share with them the results of the exchange, photos, videos, etc.

As an individual

One of the first questions you and members of your group will be asked on your return is probably “How was (place name)?” Giving general statements can reinforce stereotypes. Discuss with the group the use of “I” statements and talking about your own observations and experiences. Another person may have a different account of the visit. For example, instead of saying “People in Saskatoon like ice cream,” you can say, “When I was in Saskatoon, I noticed that many people liked to eat ice-cream.”

Thank-yous

Thank-you letters go to:

- Hosts
- All the families who participated
- The individuals and groups who helped make the exchange possible.

Three options

Put a “Thank you!” ad in the newspaper, naming all your sponsors and volunteers.

Ask the school principal or association executive director to send a thank-you letter to the principal or executive director of your twin group.

Each group member can write one letter on behalf of the group to a sponsor or person who helped.

YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada is funded by the federal government.

You may wish to send a letter or postcard to thank your Member of Parliament (postage is free to MPs). Or write to:

Youth Exchanges Canada Program
Canada Citizen Participation Branch
Department of Canadian Heritage
15 Eddy Street, 8th floor
Gatineau, QC, K1A 0M5

Programme Échanges jeunesse
Direction Générale de la
Participation des citoyens
Ministère du Patrimoine canadien
15 rue Eddy, 8e étage
Gatineau, QC, K1A 0M5

or

send an e-mail to PCH.echanges-exchanges.PCH@canada.ca This will help make sure that other young people will benefit in the future.

Share the experience

Here are some ideas on how to share your exchange experience with your community.

Slide show

- Create a slide show for an evening of celebration

Display

- Put up a floor or bulletin board display in your school or association

Book

- Compile a record of your trip in a scrapbook or a collage and present it to your school or association library

Newsletters and articles

- Edit journal entries for the school or association newsletter
- Produce a newsletter in which each group member writes about one aspect of the exchange and send it to host families, exchange sponsors, politicians
- Write an article for your local newspaper or magazine

Video

- Create a video documenting the exchange experience. Use the exchange as a basis for study at your school.

Website & social media

- Create a website for your photos and articles, perhaps along with your twin group. Share photos and write about the exchange on your school or organization's social media networks (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc)

Thank you event

- Organize a thank you event for your supporters.

Presentation

- Give a presentation or prepare a skit about the exchange to other members of your organization, school, Community Education Council, board of education.

Cable TV

- Show your video on community TV. Dub your video into other languages used by community Members

Photo swap

- Have a photo swap. Send a photo CD to your twin or share duplicated prints with other group members.

Share souvenirs

- Share souvenirs with other community youth and families.

Keep up the link

Now that you've lived in another community and made new friends, how can you maintain contact? Share information and ideas with your twin group.

Leave a record of your exchange

A written summary of the entire experience, from orientation to travel to follow-up, may be helpful for you and your organization or school.

"After recovering from the intensity of the exchange, we dubbed a video for the student body, grades 8-12. Students also updated daily journals from the trip and made scrap books from pictures they had taken. A slide presentation was made to the Kinsmen Club, and several students and I were interviewed by one of the local newspapers.

"The main event was an evening where we celebrated the exchange highlights with parents, friends and community. Students presented speeches on selected highlights, various artifacts were displayed and talked about, scrap books were put on display, the video and slides were shown, and time was given for refreshments. Some of the journal highlights are being edited for the school quarterly paper."

Evaluating the experience

To bring closure to the exchange experience, it's important to provide an opportunity for everyone involved, parents as well as group members, to talk as a group about the good and bad points of the exchange and what they learned.

The results of this discussion will help you when you are completing your evaluation for the YMCA Exchange office.

Ask group members

- What did you like? What didn't you like?
- How did you benefit from visiting your twin?
- How did you benefit from hosting your twin?
- What did you learn about your twin community? Your own community?
- What suggestions do you have for future exchanges?

Ask hosts

- How did you benefit from the hosting experience?
- What did you learn from your visitor? What did you learn about Canada?
- What suggestions do you have for future exchanges?

Do the official paperwork

Within one week of the exchange, you will receive links to an online evaluation. Please send to your Regional Coordinator a copy of your final host program, which includes any changes you made from the detailed program you sent in before the exchange.

Evaluations are a vital tool the YMCA uses to improve the program. Also, the funder requires evaluations. So, please complete them promptly.

Send, also, any updated financial reports and estimate-of-participant hours forms.

Please include any newspaper clippings and photographs that help describe your exchange experience.

The last word...

Congratulations! You have led your group through an experience they will value for years to come. You and your group are now part of the YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada network—the thousands of young people, and dedicated group leaders, who have experienced the cultural and geographic diversity of Canada since 1976.

“Now I would like to travel all over this country and learn about the various special groups, cultures and areas that it has to offer . . . I thank those who donated money, time and energy because I had the time of my life.”

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