



ROTARY YOUTH EXCHANGE

The Role of Clubs in Youth Exchange

What is the club's role in the Long-Term program?

Rotary clubs that participate in the long-term Youth Exchange program are demonstrating their commitment to International Service in one of the best, most direct, most meaningful and most fun ways possible. Clubs will seek out and sponsor local (Outbound) students to spend a year overseas in a remarkable, life-changing experience, and will Host one or more foreign (Inbound) students for a year here in your community.

Recruit: Under the leadership of a club Youth Exchange Officer, Rotarians visit high schools and/or local community organizations to tell teenagers about the opportunities in the Youth Exchange program, meet with interested students and their parents, and interview the students to determine their suitability for the program. Most students go Outbound their junior year of high school or take a 'gap' year after graduation/before college. Clubs are urged to invite their Outbound candidates to one or more Rotary meetings before the student leaves, to help them learn more about Rotary and the sponsoring club. Outbound students should be given a few club banners to exchange overseas during their year.

Host: For the Inbound students, the club is responsible for finding Host families and arranging for schooling, in addition to providing the student with a monthly allowance (see below). Ideally, there should be two or three different Host families through the year, so the student gets to enjoy a variety of experiences, several families get to enjoy the student, and no one family is over-burdened. The club must get approval from a local high school for the student's enrollment there, and that information, along with the identity of the first Host family, must be submitted to the District YE Committee at least three months before the student's arrival.

Mentor: The Host club must also designate one of its members to serve as the Inbound student's Counselor, to meet with the student on a regular basis, keep on top of the student's progress through the year, help resolve problems, and provide a direct link to the Rotary club. The Counselor can be the Youth Exchange Officer or a different member, but the Counselor cannot be the current Host parent.

Show Off: Show your Student how your club makes a difference in your community. Bring them to meeting regularly; involve the student in club activities, whether they are community service efforts, social events, or whatever. These events allow the student to meet more Rotarians, and vice versa, opening up wonderful opportunities for future times together and greater international understanding.

What is the club's role in the short-term program?

Rotary's Short-Term exchange program offers teenagers a unique opportunity to spend part of a vacation with a family in another country, and then share an equal time here with a foreign teenage guest. The program is a family-to-family exchange, usually during the summer months when school is not in session. Students spend about 3 weeks together with one student's family, then switch and spend about 3 weeks with the other student's family.

Recruit: Clubs wishing to offer this program in their communities need only to find students and families who wish to participate. The club then interview the students and parents, and, if they are acceptable candidates, forwards their applications on to the District YE Committee. As with long-term students, it's a nice idea to invite the Outbound student and parents to a Rotary meeting, to get to know the members and gain an understanding about the club and the organization as a whole.

Host: Some clubs schedule a special activity for both students during the US portion of the exchange - a cookout or other outing, or perhaps just an evening at a club member's home. Inviting both students to a Rotary meeting is, of course, always a nice idea.

Check with your District YE Chairperson to learn more.

What will it cost the club to sponsor an Outbound student?

Not very much at all, actually. A few club banners and one or two meals as guests of the club is all that's required. Many clubs choose to provide a partial scholarship to long-term outbound students, to help offset the costs of the exchange, and while we certainly would encourage clubs to do so, it is not mandatory or expected.

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What will it cost the club to Host an Inbound student?

As part of the Youth Exchange program, Rotary Clubs are required to provide a monthly allowance to Inbound long-term exchange students. This is specified on the Guarantee Form (part of the student's application), and is mandated by the US State Department for issuance of student visas. Our guidelines currently set the amount at \$100 per month. This money is paid directly to the students, to help offset the cost of school lunches and other regular expenses, and is a valid use of charitable Rotary funds.

The cost of providing a Rotary meal to an Exchange Student who visits the club regularly should also be considered an expense of the program, and some clubs also plan on gifts for the student's birthday and Christmas, and sponsor them to attend RYLA.

How do we find Exchange Student candidates?

If you think that most teenagers could not be exchange students, and could not handle the challenges of a new language, people, and culture, well, you're absolutely correct! But there are exceptional students in every school who would be perfect for this program, and would jump at the chance to take part, if only they knew about it. So the first step is to get into the schools and talk to the kids!

One good place to start is with your local Interact Club. There you have students who already have some knowledge about Rotary (or they should, anyway), and the faculty member who sponsors the Interact Club should be more than open to a speaker from Rotary. But limiting the audience to Interact members excludes other local students, and that's something you don't want to do. We have found that foreign language teachers are usually very receptive to Rotary representatives talking to their students about the YE program, and we've been very successful following that route. Does your club sponsor a Student of the Month at a high school? It is another great contact with the Counseling Office at the school an outstanding students.

Your District Youth Exchange Committee is more than willing to help. They have experience talking to teenagers, and can explain all the details of the program in a way that will excite, rather than bore, them. Contact your District YE Chairperson for help - you'll be surprised at how many students in your own community would love to spend a year overseas.

An Exchange Student candidate just called us. What do we do now?

A good first step is to refer them to this website (www.d7450youthexchange.org), where they can find plenty of information - just like you're doing right now. It's important to connect them to the club's Youth Exchange Officer to meet with the student and his/her family to get a handle on their qualifications and motivation, and to answer the many questions they may have. If the YEO is new to the position, or would like some help, just contact the District YE Committee - they should be happy to make someone available to assist.

Our club got a call/e-mail from a Rotarian overseas, looking for a place for his child. What should we do about this?

Unfortunately, some of our Rotary colleagues overseas will take unfair advantage of their membership and try to open up an opportunity for their own children. As a matter of policy, any such requests should be immediately forwarded on to the District YE Committee. But Rotary International regulations prohibit private exchanges, or even club-level exchanges. All YE arrangements must be made at the district or multi-district level.

Our exchanges are established based on years of experience, with districts whose programs we know we can rely on, both for selection of Inbounds as well as hosting of our Outbounds. It is almost always true that attempts to arrange private exchanges are a result of a student's not meeting the criteria of the local district, or the parents' trying to push the student into something they really don't want. Without the proper selection and orientation process, the chances of a student's exchange being successful are dramatically reduced. Therefore, it is rarely a good idea to endorse an independent request for an exchange, because it really puts the reputation of our entire program at risk.

Our local high school soccer coach wants us to help bring in a star player as an exchange student. How do we do that?

You probably already guessed the answer to this one. We don't. Rotary does not put its stamp on exchanges that are not the product of regular Rotary Youth Exchange procedures. A student in another country must apply through their local Rotary Club, be selected and endorsed by the local district, and be recommended by the district to us. It is not the purpose of this program to help a soccer coach win a league championship. Our goals are much more important - to build international friendships, break down barriers and stereotypes, and create understanding that transcends political boundaries. Sorry, coach, you'll have to look elsewhere.

Why can't our children and grandchildren participate in Rotary Youth Exchange?

Listen carefully, now ... **the Rotary Youth Exchange program is open to children of Rotarians and non-Rotarians alike.** Because this is not a program of the Rotary Foundation, there is no restriction on who may participate, and we can certainly send your club members' children and grandchildren, if they would like to go. At the same time, though, be careful not to restrict participation to offspring of your fellow Rotarians. Both the short-term and long-term programs offer wonderful opportunities to those very special teenagers who recognize its importance and are willing to take on its challenges. And keep in mind that parents of exchange students can also be potential new members of your club!

Do Host families have to be Rotarians?

Absolutely not. Though some clubs prefer to have the first family be a Rotary family, perhaps to cement the relationship with the club, there is no requirement that all or any of the Host families be Rotary members. In fact, Host families, like families of Outbounds, often discover Rotary because of this program, and ultimately join Rotary Clubs.

But the important thing to remember is that any reputable family in your community is eligible to Host a Rotary Exchange Student.

So how do we get started?

It's easy! Contact the Youth Exchange chairman in our District. Schedule one of the Youth Exchange committee members as a speaker for your club, and start talking about hosting an Inbound student next year (those arrangements need to be made several months in advance, so it's never too early). Make plans to talk to your area high school students early in the fall, for the long-term program the following year. Invite an Inbound student or former Outbound student to speak at your club to help inspire the membership. And get ready for one of the most rewarding, most wonderful programs that Rotary has to offer. Welcome to Rotary Youth Exchange!

