



Club Involvement in Rotary Youth Exchange



Purpose:

Provide information to Clubs for use in evaluating whether to participate in the Rotary Youth Exchange program by either hosting an Exchange Student from another country for a stay in the US or sponsoring a student from our District to go overseas as an Exchange Student in one of our partner countries.

Executive Summary:

- Rotary Youth Exchange is for High School students desiring to spend an academic year abroad (long term program) or part of a summer abroad (short term program). Ages 15 – 18 eligible.
- District 7610 coordinates this effort via a Multi District Organization called **Eastern States Student Exchange (ESSEX)**. Their web site is a good source of information on the program and is a useful point of reference: www.exchangestudent.org
- This handout is meant to provide an overview. Your District Youth Exchange Committee is a good source of specific information and the place to go if you would like more information or have questions.

Background:

The Rotary Youth Exchange program is a key element in promoting international understanding; Rotary Clubs have been engaged in youth exchange programs since 1927.

Rotary Clubs coordinate Youth Exchange initiatives through their applicable Rotary District. Our Districts coordinate exchange program participation through ESSEX (www.exchangestudent.org) which encompasses the Districts from North Carolina through Canada along the East Coast. Every year about 250 students go abroad to study and we ESSEX Districts host about 275 inbound students for the academic year.

There are **two basic kinds of youth exchange**, Short Term and Long Term. Both are available to youth in our Districts, to families of Rotarians and non-Rotarians alike.

- The **Short Term** program is the easiest to coordinate and involves a one-to-one exchange between host families in two countries. They are conducted during the summer and are of 3 – 6 weeks duration.
- The **Long Term** exchange is for the duration of the school year. Families sending students abroad are expected to host inbound students or assist the Club / District in finding an appropriate first Host Family for a corresponding Inbound student.

Note that there is also a program for students age 18 to 25 called 'New Generations' Exchange. Similar to the Short Term program it is part of Rotary Youth Exchange but not all Districts participate in this initiative. Note also that Youth Exchange is commonly confused with other Rotary programs such as Group Study Exchange, Ambassadorial Scholarships, etc but these are separate efforts.

As Rotarians we take our responsibility for protecting students seriously and adhere to the ESSEX and Rotary "Student Protection Policy". All Rotarian volunteers involved in this initiative must agree to be

subject to a background check; this is a Rotary requirement for working with Youth, and extends to host family members as well (those over age 18).

Outbound Student Eligibility Criteria:

- Students must be between the ages of 15 and 18. Some countries have slightly more limiting age restrictions and other rules concerning language ability, class standing, etc. Some countries accept HS graduates who would be studying as a ‘gap year’ between HS and College, others do not. (We currently exchange students with approximately 60 countries). Some countries accept students as old as 18 ½ years old – in some cases even slightly older – and others have more restrictive age constraints. Some countries have additional requirements (“No Vegetarians” “Must have at least 2 years of Spanish...”) so we need to check eligibility for each student against the latest information.
- Note that this applies to the Long Term as well as the Short Term program.
- Students who have family members in Rotary are eligible, not precluded like some other Rotary programs...
- All students going Outbound from our District must be sponsored by one of the District’s Clubs.
- The ideal candidate is mature, creative, and motivated. This is not a good program for students that are unable to demonstrate considerable individual initiative. The full support of both parents is required.
- This is a competitive program with only a limited number of applicants accepted. Our district will make every effort to place properly qualified individuals who are motivated and who meet all eligibility requirements. The limit each year is based on the number of Clubs that agree to accept an Inbound student in exchange and the number of students we can responsibly manage at the District level (currently a maximum of about 5-6).

Club Responsibilities for Sponsoring a Short Term Exchange Student:

- This is the Youth Exchange program which offers the least amount of paperwork, etc. It is a ‘mutual exchange’ between two families of students who visit over the summer. Rotary Clubs on both ends facilitate the exchange through the Rotary Youth Exchange Structure. Among other things this program is easier to run because there is not a problem with a student missing school, and the ‘host family’ for the inbound student will necessarily be the family that sends the student.
- Getting the word out on the program; if your Club is involved in activities such as RYLA or Interact that is a great means of informing candidates.
- Selection and screening process. Clubs must interview and select students for the exchange, and appoint a Rotarian counselor for each student to assist with the application process and serve as a ‘go-between’ and mentor along the way.
- Clubs sponsoring Short Term exchanges are encouraged to have the students visit the Club during the time when both students are in the US in order to share their experiences.
- There is no required monetary expense for this program but most Clubs will host the student and their family for at least one meeting, and provide them a Club Banner or pins, etc to use on the Exchange.

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- Selection and screening process. Clubs must interview and select students for the exchange, and appoint a Rotarian counselor for each student to assist with the application process and serve as a 'go-between' and mentor along the way.
- If a student is selected to participate in the Exchange, the Club should be actively involved in preparing the student and their family and should help in preparing a presentation to be delivered by the student when he / she arrives at the host Club overseas.
- Some Clubs assist the student in funding their exchange through direct contributions or fundraising support. In our District this has ranged from minimal support (the cost of 2-3 meals when the student / family visits the Club) up to as much as about \$500 (the cost of a Rotary blazer, language materials, gifts for the student to give to the host Club / families on behalf of their Club, banners, pins...). It's up to the Club to determine appropriate level of financial support.

Host Family Criteria for hosting an Inbound Student:

- To be eligible, they must be screened by the Host Rotary Club, agree to background checks for all members of the household age 18 or older, and be willing to provide love and support, as well as room and board, to the incoming student.
- Rotary requires that the responsibility for hosting an inbound student be shared between at least two families so that the student can experience life in the States from at least two perspectives. Three host families per student are also fine; in unusual circumstances it is possible for the student to remain with the same host family all year. To initiate the exchange only the first host family needs to be identified in advance.
- To avoid having to transfer schools during the academic year it is important that all host families be located within the same School District.
- During the screening by the Host Club, the family must be interviewed in their home; they must have space for the student (a separate bedroom is ideal but not required, the student may share a bedroom with a son / daughter of the same sex) and a willingness to help with the 'day to day' needs of the student in school, etc.
- The host parents may be Rotarians or non-Rotarians; parents of outbound exchange students are usually a good choice, or if they are unable to host should be able to help recruit families from within their respective circles of influence.
- Note that there are many benefits to generous families for hosting a student, however (aside from a modest tax deduction) they are not monetary; by policy and unlike some other programs, Rotary does not pay families to host students.

Club Responsibilities for hosting an Inbound Student:

- Designate a Club Counselor / Youth Exchange Officer (Rotarian, preferably of the same gender as the student) who agrees to meet with the student on a monthly basis to provide encouragement and mentoring. Note that the Club Counselor cannot be a member of the Host Family.
- Assist and identify candidate Host Families
- Assist in helping with the student's enrollment in the nearest public High School, etc.
- Provide the student with a monthly stipend for the student for spending money. It is up to the Club to determine the amount; \$65 monthly is the minimum amount for our District but about \$100 is recommended. In addition the Club should budget for additional expenses as they see fit. In recent years Clubs have decided to pay for 'extras' such as a minimal monthly cell phone use for the student, books or activity fees at the school they attend, funding for the student to participate in multi-District activities (e.g. paying for a lift ticket for a ski trip, paying the registration fee for Rotary Day at the UN, etc). Annual costs can range from about \$1000 to over \$2000 depending on

circumstances and Club resources; smaller Clubs with limited budgets are encouraged to consider 'co-hosting' students with other Clubs (District YE Committee can help arrange this if needed).

- Include the student in Club activities (Club visits, assisting with service projects, fundraisers...).

Frequently Asked Questions:

How much does this cost? For the Families of the Students:

- Application fees/Program fees to the District are modest. A preliminary application fee of \$125 is required when a student becomes a candidate, an additional fee of \$375 is due upon country placement. This fee covers the cost of required orientation training, the ESSEX fees, etc.
- Mandatory health insurance policy (cost about \$800 for the year)
- Airfare to the destination country (round trip with an 'open' return date).
- Provide an "emergency fund" to be kept by the host family for emergency use (and returned at the end of the year if not used) Typically \$500, this varies depending on where the student is placed.
- Normal expenses for the student such as passport fees, clothes appropriate for the region, additional spending money for the student, the cost of 'extras' such as student trips, etc.
- The Host Family will pay for normal 'room and board' expenses.
- The Host Club will provide a monthly stipend (depending on the local area, usually about the equivalent of \$100). There is no tuition expense.

How much does this cost? For the Clubs sponsoring the Students:

- **Outbound** – Time and effort to screen the student and invite them to the Club for speaking prior to and after returning from the exchange. Optional expenses associated with the exchange (for example the Club could decide to purchase 'coffee table books' of the local area for the student to use as gifts to their host family on behalf of the Rotary Club). Possibly assist the student in raising funds for the exchange. In practice a budget of \$500 is very generous, but this is optional.
- **Inbound (students hosted in America)** - Stipend budget of approx \$1000 (10 months - \$100 per month). Time and effort of finding host families, coordinating with High School., Identifying a Club member to be counselor – meeting with student monthly, and completing required paperwork for program oversight, and perhaps providing funding for student to participate in District Conference. Additional expenses as the Club deems appropriate (e.g. a 'family plan' cell phone for the student to use, activity fees for the student if required by the school, musical instrument rental, field trip costs etc). For planning purposes we recommend that a budget of approx. \$2000 be considered for a full year of support, depending again on Club priorities and possibilities. Smaller Clubs with limited budgets may find it advantageous to Co-Host a student with another Club; this has worked well in our District. Please let anyone on the YE Committee know if that is something we can help broker.

What if the student has 'issues'?

- 97% of students that complete this program tell post-program surveys that this year was 'the best of their life' and find it to be a year of tremendous personal growth and rich experiences. There are those however, despite the screening that goes on beforehand and mentoring and counseling that goes on during the program, that are unable to complete the program and must be sent back (the reason for the 'open' ticket!).

- Occasionally this is due to no fault of the student (for instance a death in the family back home) but it can also occur if the student does not make a successful adjustment or persistently violates the rules of the exchange.
- Those rules (No drugs, no drinking, no driving, and no ‘steady’ dating) are agreed to beforehand by the students as a condition of acceptance into the program and violations are taken seriously.
- As anyone who works with young people of this age group will understand, even the best students will have an occasional bout of homesickness, difficulty with an academic subject, problems of one sort or another with friends, etc. These are part of growing up and are normally dealt with effectively by the interaction of the student with the Host Family and Club Counselor.
- The Rotary Youth Exchange Program has well established layers of oversight and experienced counselors and country coordinators in every country to implement the program, provide safe havens in times of trouble, and provide safeguards for the exchange from entry into the country to exiting the country at the end of the exchange.

We’re a Small Club – is this too involved for us to undertake?

- Small Clubs have been very successful in both sponsoring and hosting students, for some it has been one of the most popular activities of the Rotary year and one that members enjoy because of the ability to make a difference in the lives of young people in their community and internationally.
- Clearly, involvement in Youth Exchange is a commitment which involves both time and expense. In the past, small Clubs in our District have effectively pooled resources to ‘Co Host’ an inbound student (each club contributing half of the Stipend for instance). If you’re interested, we at the District level can help to broker these sorts of arrangements.
- Small Clubs – or any Club – that is interested can do a Short Term exchange with little to no expense to the Club. The Short Term exchange is easy and can be a great way to get students and families in your area engaged.

How can we get started?

- If your Club has been participating in Youth Exchange over the years, chances are that this program is already familiar to you. If not, one suggestion is to start by pursuing the Short Term program.
- This is very ‘user friendly’ and easier to manage as it does not require students to miss school, normally doesn’t involve a Visa, and the ‘host family’ question is readily resolved because the exchange is mutual.
- Interested Clubs should contact a member of the Youth Exchange Committee to arrange a speaker for their Club program. We can usually also provide an exchange student to attend or a student who has recently returned from Exchange.
- Have your Club’s point of contact research the program via the ESSEX web site (www.exchangestudent.org) and then promote it via your normal dialog with youth in your Club (via the Interact Clubs or RYLA for example).
- Short term candidates need to be identified mid year; typically the deadline for ESSEX to receive their package is 1 May, the summer before the exchange (earlier, of course, is better).

For more information consult the Rotary web site (see the Youth Exchange section), the District Web Site and especially the ESSEX web site. If you or your Club would like more information, contact your Youth Exchange Committee at the District and see if they could either arrange to provide a speaker at your Club, facilitate contact with a former exchange student or former / current host family or answer particular questions that might come up.

Resources:

Rotary Web Site: <http://rotary.org/en/StudentsAndYouth/YouthPrograms/RotaryYouthExchange>

Eastern States Student Exchange: <http://www.exchangestudent.org/>

Rotarians on the District Youth Exchange Committee:

Matt Leavitt – Crystal City Pentagon Club - (Chair) – rye7610@gmail.com

Lynde Scheffer – Ashburn Club - (Vice Chair) – lvs7610rye@aol.com

Phil Rusciollelli – Leesburg Club - (Youth Protection) – Pbrusciollelli@aol.com

Mykelle Laws – Culpeper Club – (Outbound Coordinator) – mhlaws@aol.com

Sharon Joyce – Gloucester Point Club - (Inbound Coordinator) – sharon.joyce1961@gmail.com

Verne Tuininga – Fairfax Club - (Short Term) – verne8294@yahoo.com

John Koontz – Middlesex Co Club - (Committee Member) – rightlanechoppers@gmail.com

PJ Maddox – Merrifield Dunn Loring Club - (Committee Member) – pjmaddox@earthlink.net