



YMCA YOUTH EXCHANGES CANADA

Guide and Application Form



With the participation of the
Department of Canadian Heritage



YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada

**YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada
YMCA
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Toronto ON M4Y 1T4
1-877-639-9987**

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Canadian Heritage Patrimoine canadien

The Government of Canada, through Exchanges Canada, a part of the Department of Canadian Heritage, provides financial assistance for this program. Exchanges Canada also offers information on exchange activities available to young Canadians through the 1 800 O-CANADA information line (1 800 622-6232, TDD/TTY 1 800 465-7735), or at www.exchanges.gc.ca. You may reach Exchanges Canada at:

**12 York Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1N 5S6**

Canada

YMCA

Youth Exchanges Canada

Have you or your group ever thought about exploring other regions of Canada, living in another community, meeting new people, learning Canada's other official language or exploring Canada's cultural diversity?

YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada is a group reciprocal home-stay exchange program for Canadian school or community groups.

Groups of 10 to 30 participants between the ages of 12 and 17 are twinned with groups the same age from another province or territory and take turns staying in each other's homes for at least five days. Camp-stay arrangements could be an alternative for groups involved in outdoor activities.

The various stages of the exchange—preparation, the actual exchange, hosting the twin group, and follow-up to the exchange—all allow participants an opportunity to become involved in both communities, develop personal skills, learn more about Canada's diversity and develop a stronger sense of community.



Program Objectives

- Contribute to improved knowledge and understanding of Canada among Canadian youth, enabling them to learn firsthand about the history, geography, the 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 and other communities in Canada.

8 Keys to a Great Exchange

1. Your objectives

Your exchange application should meet the objectives of YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada. Include learning, communication and engagement activities before, during and after the actual exchange.

A portion of exchanges may involve official languages, including opportunities for second-language learning and for official-language minority groups to exchange.

Exchanges are a good way to learn about environmental issues, cultural diversity, rural and urban life, improve your second language or become involved in the community.

If you clearly define learning objectives for the exchange, it will be easier to twin your group with a group that shares the same interests.

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More keys to a successful exchange

2. The participants

You may be organizing an exchange that includes an entire class or a group such as a club, sports team or association. If the group is being formed specifically to go on an exchange, we encourage you to include youth from a variety of backgrounds.

The program pays the transportation costs for all eligible participants and organizers.

3. The twin

If you wish to be twinned with a specific group, please indicate the name, address and telephone number of the organizer of this group. We will try our best to meet your request. We can help you find a group that shares your objectives and interests in organizing the same types of activities as your group.

4. Planned activities

Exchanges usually last at least five days, excluding travel time. It is essential to plan carefully the activities before, during and after the exchange.

It may be useful to agree on a joint project, e.g. geography, history, arts or the environment, on which you will work with the organizer of the other group before, during and after the exchange. The exchange is an opportunity for the participants to get to know a community different from their own and, in many cases, to practise their second language.

5. Involvement

Successful exchanges have the participants involved in all aspects of the exchange, including planning and fundraising. Those involved benefit greatly from the experience, developing communication, planning, and leadership skills. As well, their increased involvement leads to increased commitment to the exchange.

6. Engagement

All YMCA youth exchanges include an opportunity for youth to become more actively engaged in their own and their twin community.

Youth engagement is their meaningful participation and involvement in an activity with a focus outside themselves. Examples might include a local cleanup, service, or community educational awareness project. The participants should initiate, plan and lead these projects, thereby gaining the most complete experience possible.

Youth engagement activities must be structured and provide an experience that link the youth and the outside world and instill in the youth a sense of significance and involvement.

Groups now have the opportunity to apply for two types of exchanges.

Traditional exchanges have a major focus that is cultural, but they have at least one engagement activity.

Engagement exchanges have the youth engagement component as the major focus.

In these exchanges, at least half of the exchange period is dedicated to the engagement activity. Please make sure you indicate your preference on your application.

7. Fundraising

The Government of Canada through YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada pays for the travel costs of all eligible participants and organizers. However, you will need to raise funds to cover the cost of activities in the host community, local transportation costs, as well as group membership fees if needed.

A fundraising event is an excellent way for participants to learn to cooperate with others and to involve members of the local community.

8. Continuing the exchange experience

Once the twinned groups have hosted each other, the organizers should encourage continued interaction between the groups to promote lasting links.

Both organizers and participants must evaluate their experience. These results will help assess the impact of YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada and better serve Canadians.

Remember

A successful exchange is carefully planned. It is an exciting experience for the group that involves full participation by youth, their parents and the organizers.

A program for all Canadian youth

YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada encourages the participation of youth from traditionally under-represented groups. Priority will be 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.

Aboriginal 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.

Youth from rural or isolated areas

A person who lives in a community with a population of less than 10,000.

Visible minority youth

An individual, other than an Aboriginal person, who is non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour.

Special Measures Funding

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

Sometimes, alternative housing is required. There may be families who would have difficulties hosting a youth in their home. Many barriers may be overcome by sensitive handling on the part of the organizer. 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.

Youth with disabilities may have special needs. You should consult with them to prepare a detailed list of needs, determining whether there is a need for modified vehicles, accessible home or special equipment. Keep in mind such needs may be more easily accommodated in urban centres. 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 representative will help you find the best way to accommodate them. Where local community resources are not available, you may ask for additional support. Additional funding may be available. Your YMCA representative will evaluate the needs and resources on a case-by-case basis. Discuss it with your YMCA representative.

Costs

The Government of Canada through YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada pays for

- the travel costs of all eligible participants and organizers (one organizer for each group of 10 youth or fewer, two organizers for 11–20 youth and three organizers for 21–30 youth), including airport improvement taxes
- accommodation and meal expenses if the group must stop overnight on its way to the host community
- the cost of special measures that may be required.

The group pays for

- hosting-related expenses such as local transportation and activity costs (conditional upon the agreement of both organizers)
- \$40 registration fee for each participant and leader.

Roles and Responsibilities

Organizers

Prior to approval

- Write up an exchange proposal that reflects YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada objectives.
- Where appropriate, design a project geared to a specific field of interest, such as geography, history, the arts, sciences, the environment, amateur sport, second language, community development, youth engagement.
- Carefully organize the exchange experience, including activities before, during and after the exchange, in keeping with YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada objectives.
- Submit the completed application form with or without a twin group.

After approval

- Raise awareness of the exchange with parents and throughout the community using information sessions, letters, local media, etc.
- Find meaningful ways to involve participants in all aspects of the exchange.

- Assign a twin to each participant.
- Plan a varied program of activities with the twin group.
- Organize fundraising activities and establish partnerships with sponsors such as municipalities, businesses and community organizations, the local media, etc.
- Take appropriate measures to ensure participants' security; conduct the mandatory screening of host families; make sure members of the group are adequately insured; make note of any medical conditions among group members.
- Return the required documents to the address indicated by the assigned due date.

During the exchange

- Take responsibility for the group at all times while staying in the host community.
- Take responsibility, along with parents, for hosting of the twin group.

After the exchange

- Ensure all evaluation forms are completed and returned to the address indicated.
- Encourage continued interaction between the groups to promote lasting links among participants.
- Encourage youth to share the experience with other groups.



Roles and Responsibilities

Youth Participants

- Take an active role in all three phases of the exchange experience: planning and preparing the exchange, organizing activities while hosting the twinned group, and taking part in post-exchange activities including the evaluation.
- Bring commitment and energy to the exchange process.
- Share the experience with other youth, schools and the community at large (meetings, articles in local newspapers, interviews, etc.).
- Fill out the participant's evaluation form.

YMCA

- Evaluate group applications.
- Facilitate the twinning of groups.
- Coordinate travel between the twinned communities.
- Support the organizers by answering their questions, helping them solve problems, and providing documentation and orientation sessions when appropriate.



How to submit an application

Send the completed application form and letter of approval from your organization (i.e. school board and the school principal, head of your community organization) to the YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada office.

Send to:
 YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada
 YMCA
 42 Charles Street East
 Toronto ON M4Y 1T4
 Fax: 416-928-3552

Are you eligible?

Yes, if...

- The exchange involves groups of 10 to 30 participants.
- Participants are from a school group or youth group who belong to a recognized community organization.
- The participants are between 12 and 17 years of age.
- The exchanges last at least five days, excluding travel time.
- Participants are twinned with a youth their own age. Families act as hosts during the exchange (camp-stay also possible).
- The exchange is carefully organized, including activities before, during and after the exchange that address YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada objectives.
- The group organizes fundraising events to cover the cost of activities and local transportation when hosting the twin group.
- The group agrees to pay a \$40 registration fee per person.

Note: Some exceptions apply. See Special Measures on page 5.

DEADLINES

Applications may be submitted at any time. September 30 is the deadline for travel between January and June.

March 1 is the deadline for travel between July and December.

If your application is accepted

You will receive an answer from the YMCA within a few weeks. If your application is accepted, you will receive a copy of the organizer's handbook. The handbook will help you organize your exchange and provide you with information on topics such as programming of activities, fundraising and budgeting, twinning of participants, etc. You will also receive the evaluation forms that you must fill out once the exchange stage of the experience has been completed.

By the assigned date you will need to send all required documents and fees to the YMCA. If the information provided is complete, the YMCA will then confirm the exchange before proceeding with travel arrangements.

Priority

Remember, priority will be given to groups in which at least 30 per cent of the participants are from traditionally under-represented groups.

