



YMCA YOUTH EXCHANGES CANADA

Module 1 - Building the Group



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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).

Canada

Acknowledgements

Since 1994, we have received advice, suggestions and examples from many exchange leaders. We thank them for their support. We also wish to thank our Youth Advisory Committee and our Group Leader Advisory Committee for their invaluable feedback and suggestions.

We would like to thank the Canadian 4-H Council, Experiences Canada, and the many other organizations who contributed.

Revised 2021

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Your YMCA's charitable registration number is 11930 7080.

Workbook for YMCA Exchange Leaders

Module 1 - Building the Group

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Building the Group

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.

Special Measures Funding

Special Measures funding is available to encourage all Canadian youth to participate in YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada.

We understand some youth may face barriers they think can affect participation. For example, some families may wish to offer a safe home but do not have the budget to do so. Community meals may enable them to participate, and the YMCA can provide assistance for food costs.

In other cases, families are unable to host a youth in their home, and alternative housing is required. The group can overcome many barriers with sensitive handling. 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 the common stay, in which the group stays in alternative accommodations such as dormitories.

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; your YMCA Regional Coordinator will help you find the best way to accommodate them. If local community resources are not available, additional funding may be available. Your Regional Coordinator will evaluate the needs and resources case by case.

Hold the 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 or games.
- Ask members what they want to learn from the exchange and why they are interested in participating.
- Ask if they have any concerns about participating.

Goals

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

1. **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.
2. **Travelling and hosting:** Groups experience the diversity of Canada by visiting their twin community and seeing their own community through their "twin's eyes" when hosting. Participants stay 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.
3. **After travelling:** The group consolidates the exchange experience by participating in follow-up activities and evaluation exercises.

Responsibilities

- Outline your responsibilities as group leader, which of those you share with participants and which are yours alone.
- Ask participants what are their top three skills.
- Discuss and agree on the responsibilities of participants.

Participation requirements

- How many meetings are they to attend? When will they be held? Weekly? Bi-weekly?
- Are they in any extra-curricular activities? How much time do they have to attend planning meetings?
- Will they be expected to work in committees? Small groups?
- Draw up a schedule of meetings.

Costs

- What will be the costs? How much will the group need to raise? How will youth be involved in fundraising?
- How can we maximize low cost or free activities?

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 to each member. Invite parents/guardians to this first meeting and have a consent signing party.

"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."

- Group Leader

Planning Meetings

We recommend holding regular meetings throughout the planning process. Regular get-togethers keep everyone engaged, up to date, and build a sense of community and commitment.

If you're a school group, involve other teachers/support staff, the local school board, and the principal in these meetings. If you're 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.

Tip: Some group leaders have used the Youth Guide to help structure planning meetings. The guide can be found on the group leader website <https://www.yecgl.net>.

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.

Behaviour

- Use the exercise on creating a safe space and expectations on p. 9. 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.

Suggested guidelines for using internet

- Be aware of the appropriateness of the content you are watching when around others, or when staying in someone else's home
- Keep your internet identity secret – don't post or give out your location, address, phone number, or full name to the public.
- You only get to do this exchange experience once, so soak up as much of it as you can with the people around you

Get Permission

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

You, along with every other group leader who is participating, will have to fill out the Leader's acceptance.

Each participant must **completely fill out and sign a consent form**. 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 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.

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 due to circumstances beyond their control. The YMCA, on a case-by-case basis, will determine if the cause is sufficient to cover name change costs.

Inform your Regional Coordinator 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. It often costs the program more for travel.

Dismissing a Participant

At the group 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 pick up 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.

Example Group Building Activities

Creating a Safe Space

Objectives: To develop guidelines that help every participant feel safe and comfortable to enable everyone to participate in the group

Supplies: Flip chart and markers

Ask the group what safe space means to them. If they have not heard the term, explain that you would like to create a safe space where everyone feels comfortable and participates. Write their answers on the chart.

If it hasn't come up, explain that lots of injustices happen. We cannot control what happens everywhere. As a group we would like to control our own space so that everyone feels included and safe. Prejudice still exists but we hope the exchanges zone can be free from discrimination on the grounds of gender, race, sexual orientation, ability, religion, culture, etc.

Explain that conflict is not a bad thing, but a natural part of most groups and that it also happens in a safe group. Having guidelines will help the group deal with conflict when it arises.

Ask the group to come up with guidelines to make sure the group is a safe space. Say that it's also important to develop ground rules to deal with issues that that may come up such as punctuality. Record ideas on the chart.

With the help of the group, write guidelines. Ensure the group deals with punctuality, group discussions, group participation and confidentiality

Sample guidelines

- Stories shared in the room stay in the room (no gossiping).
- I agree that only one person should speak at a time.
- I agree to speak for myself and from my own experience. I will use "I" statements.
- I agree to be honest.
- I agree to treat everyone with respect.
- When I hear something that is inappropriate or I disagree with a statement I will respectfully tell the person and disagree with the statement rather than attack the person.
- I agree to be patient.
- I agree to be open-minded and listen to opinions different from my own.

Developing Expectations for Behaviour

Objectives: To have participants and parents develop and agree on guidelines for the exchange that will ensure the whole group is safe and has a positive experience.

Supplies: Enough coloured cards for group pens, flip chart, markers.

Before the meeting, number the cards 1 to 6. Write these subjects on a flip chart:

- bus and air travel (to and from airports, during excursions)
- meeting at twin school or association (before and after excursions)
- living with hosts or in common stay
- free time
- smoking, alcohol, drugs and other substances
- scheduled group and individual activities

1. Distribute different colour cards for parents/guardians, participants, and other family members/friends.
2. Read out subjects. Check with group for any other areas. (If there is an addition, ask one of the groups to also discuss the new subject.)
3. Divide the people into six groups (by number). Each group goes to a designated area of the room.
4. Ask each group to discuss and agree upon an acceptable set of behaviours for one subject (or two if there's an additional subject).
5. Each group selects a recorder to write down on flip chart paper the agreed-upon set of behaviour expectations.
6. Each recorder presents their group's comments to the meeting.
7. Combine the comments to create one list of behavioural expectations.

Adapted from the Edward Milne School Visions Exchange Group (Sooke, British Columbia)

Some Sample Guidelines - Staying with a Host

A host is generous in welcoming you into their home and it's important that you express your thanks. Act in a way that respects all the family members, their belongings and their privacy.



You'll have a better time if you're enthusiastic and interested in what's around you and eager to take part in the activities they have planned. Try to adapt to the family's daily routine.

Here are some things to keep in mind when you are a guest:

- Tell your host if you have any dietary concerns or food allergies.
- If you are given food you're not used to, try a little. If you don't like it, don't make a face, just be honest that you are not used to eating this food.
- Knock before entering a room with a closed door.
- Do not go into someone else's room to borrow or look for something without their permission.
- Before you go to bed, ask about the morning schedule so you'll know when to get up and take a shower.
- After you use the bathroom, pick up your wet towels and rinse the toothpaste marks from the sink.
- Be neat. Hang up your clothes, make your bed, and keep your things together.
- If you're invited to help yourself to snacks, do it at appropriate times and in small amounts.
- Offer to help with the house or farm work.
- When the family does something for you, be sure to say thanks.
- As a courtesy to your host family, ask permission to smoke before you light up.
- If you need something, ask them.
- If you're able, bring a small gift for the family.

Conflict Resolution and Group Decision Making

Objectives: To let participants safely express their views on how they make decisions as a group; to develop respectful, inclusive techniques for making decisions and resolving conflicts.

Supplies: Flip chart and markers, printed scenarios (use samples or create your own)

1. Tell participants to take five minutes to think about a conflict that they have been involved in. Invite them to share with the group:

- What was the conflict about?
- Why did it occur?
- How was the conflict resolved?
- What was their role in the conflict and its resolution?
- How do they feel about their role?

2. Divide participants into four groups and give each a scenario. Ask them how they would manage the conflict. Give them 20 minutes to think about and discuss it. Then each group shares its responses with the larger group.

3. Reflection

- How did your group figure out a solution to your scenario? What processes did you use?
- Was there any conflict in your group?
- If so, how did you deal with it? What worked? What didn't? How do you feel about your group process?
- Is it always better to try to avoid conflict? Is this possible or realistic? Is conflict necessarily bad? Why or why not?
- What can we learn from dealing with conflict? What characterizes good conflict management? What skills do you need to resolve conflict well?
- What are the biggest challenges to resolving conflict?
- What are some positive, inclusive ways to manage conflicts and make group decisions?

Sample scenarios

- A. While planning the exchange, the group decides to put on a talent night to promote the program and serve as a fundraiser. They divide into four groups, each taking responsibility for key aspects of the show. When the whole group gets together the following week, it becomes clear that one group has done nothing. When asked why, they offer excuses and tell the rest of the group to relax.
- B. During the weekly meetings, three members tend to do all the talking. They dominate the meetings with their strong opinions and loud voices. When some of the quieter participants bring this fact to their attention, the talkers respond by saying that if they don't talk, nobody else does and nothing ever gets done.
- C. There have been some personality clashes within the group. The group decides to meet to try to resolve them. At the meeting, half the participants (including some involved in the clashes) insist that everything is fine and everyone should put bad feelings aside and focus on the positive. The other half really wants to talk and work through the problems together, believing that otherwise the problems will never go away.
- D. During the travel phase of your exchange all members of your twin group host your group. One participant, who does not have any food allergies or dietary considerations, is placed with a host who prepares food that she is not used to eating. During one supper, the participant is served some dishes she has never seen before. She makes some faces and says "this is really slimy, what's this?" The host mother is upset and says "just eat the food." After this meal there is some tension between the participant and the rest of the family. When the participant talks to her twin, she is told that the parents feel offended because she is not respecting their traditions.

Mute Organization

Objective: To develop communication skills

How to play: Have participants make a line in a certain order (their birth month, birth date, alphabetical order of their name or last name, etc). The catch is they have to do this without talking at all.

Human Knot

Objective: To develop communication, leadership, and problem-solving skills.

How to play

- Ensure participants are comfortable with being very close to each other.
- Have the team make a circle.
- Now tell them to put their right hand in the middle and grab the hand of someone that is not BESIDE them.
- Next, have them put their left arm in the circle and grab someone else's arm who is not beside them AND who isn't the person holding on to their right arm. Otherwise, it won't work.
- Now the teens have to talk to each other and figure out how to untangle without letting go of the hands. It may involve climbing over arms or crawling under.
- The players will become more tangled if they don't communicate with each other.

Egg Rocket: Problem Solving, Teamwork Skills

Objective: To develop problem solving and teamwork skills.

Supplies: Paper, tape, eggs

How to play: Divide the group into two or more teams.

- Give each team papers, tape, and one egg. Tell them that they have to build a rocket that will be thrown up in the air or dropped from the height. The rocket has to protect the egg from smashing.
- Once the kids have made the rockets, put the egg in the rocket.
- Now drop or throw all the rockets from the same height.
- The egg that is in the best condition will win.
- If none of the eggs break, then throw again to decide the winner.

Toilet Paper Game: Getting to Know Each Other

Objective: An icebreaker activity to help the group get to know each other.

Supplies: A toilet paper roll or cut up paper, pens

How to play

- Pass around a toilet paper roll and let each participant rip off as many squares as they want, making sure there is enough for everyone.
- Once everyone has some, everyone has to reveal something true about their life, for each square that they have.
- For example, if a person has 4 squares, they must reveal 4 truths about themselves. If a person took 37 squares, they must reveal 37 things about themselves.

Blanket Flip-Over: Communication and Problem Solving, Leadership

Objective: To develop communication, problem solving, and leadership skills.

Supplies: You will need a blanket, tarp, or something else they can stand on.

How to play:

- Have the whole group stand on to the blanket or tarp. Nobody's feet can touch the floor outside the tarp.
- Without anyone getting off the blanket/tarp, have participants flip it all over, so that they are standing on the side that face down
- Alternative: have them fold the blanket/tarp in half while still all standing on it.
- Repeat until they're all very close to one another and can't fold it anymore.

Build a Bridge

Objective: To develop creativity, teamwork, problem solving skills, and communication skills.

Supplies: A few bowls, water, popsicle sticks, putty, string, paper clips, pebbles

How to play

- Split group into equal teams.
- Give each team a bowl of water and a building kit including items like ice cream pop sticks, putty, string, paper clips, etc.
- Set the timer for 30 minutes and let creative nature ignite as each group works together to build a bridge that spans across the bowl of water.
- Once 30 minutes is up, each group demonstrates how well their bridge works by adding pebbles one at a time to see whose bridge is the strongest.