



YMCA YOUTH EXCHANGES CANADA

Module 2 – Planning the Exchange



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Canada

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Workbook for YMCA Exchange Leaders

Module 2 – Planning the Exchange

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Planning the Exchange

Taking Care of Yourself While Planning the Exchange

Putting together an exchange can be a lot of hard and demanding work. With the help of our Group Leader Advisory Committee, we have come up with some useful tips that have gotten them through many exchanges. Here are some helpful tips and suggestions to set yourself up with the necessary supports and resources to plan an exchange.

Divide and delegate

What kind of team support system will you need to fall back on during the exchange? There is a lot of paperwork to get through and we assume your role as group leader is on top of many others. Have other people, preferably other group leaders support you with this.

Prioritize and manage and your time

How much time do you have to dedicate to the exchange? Ensure you know when documents are due, so you can plan which ones you should be focusing on in the beginning of the process and which ones can wait.

Recognize your skills

Share these with your team so each person knows where their strengths lie and how they complement everyone else's.

Continue with life activities

Just as you should schedule time to work on the exchange, you should also schedule in some deliberate downtime and do things that you enjoy, make you happy, and leaves you feeling relaxed and ready to continue working.

Know yourself

How do you deal with stress? Last minute changes? Things that are out of your control? Know which signs indicate that you may feel stressed, overwhelmed or burnt out.

Set Your Objectives

At your first meeting, review the outline and objectives of the Youth Exchanges Canada Program. These objectives are:

- 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.

Collaborate 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.

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.

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. In order to avoid disappointments, confusion, frustration or unmet expectations, it is imperative that both twinned groups communicate what their vision is for the exchange as a whole (both the visiting and hosting portion of the exchange).

This information communicated early on will provide each group with ample time to make plans to ensure that they are doing their part to contribute to the shared vision. To get the most out of it, here's what fellow group leaders have recommended.

Communicate

- Determine the best way to connect: email, social media, telephone, text. Figure out what works best for you and your twin group leader.
- Schedule a weekly check-in so that you may keep each other aware of changes and plans.

Be aware

- Be aware that you may have different leadership styles. It may take time to adjust to each other.
- Be mindful of the types of community you are visiting. Discuss your own community profile. How will these differences or similarities impact the planning process? Your fundraising? The activities you plan?
- Be mindful of the group you are exchanging with. Is this a group of outgoing youth? Is this a group may need time to warm up? Knowing your twinned group before leaving is important for how you plan ice-breaking activities.

Don't assume

- Check out all details for the exchange program, all your assumptions for group participation and attitudes during the visit, potential expenses and who will be paying for what.

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.

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 everyone can 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.)

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.

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.

Youth engagement

One of the core principles of the exchange program is youth engagement. Engaging youth in the process of planning and facilitating activities is an essential component of a successful exchange. Programs can meet the unique needs of youth by engaging them in program planning and decision-making.

Our youth advisory 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.

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.
- It may be helpful to plan a breath of activities and types of programming, with a variety of participation.

Community engagement

- Integrate participants’ different social settings in the exchange such as family, schools, peer groups, neighbourhoods, and cultural and community organizations.
- Participating in regular local activities, helps give your group a good overview of the community.

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 group must incorporate 8 hours of volunteer work into their exchange plan.**

Physical and psychological safety

- 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.

- For youth to get the most out of their participation, it is essential that they feel safe.
- Build group guidelines and values with the youth and make sure to model these guidelines and values. Have group protocols and supports to address inappropriate behaviours or safety issues.

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.

Accessibility

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

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. Potluck suppers are a favourite.

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.

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.

Culture

- A highlight of several exchange programs is an opportunity for the visiting group, or both, to share their culture with 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.

Post-exchange

- In your plan, include the list of activities the group plans to do after the travelling and hosting.
- This section of the plan will include thank you, evaluation activities and ways to keep up the connections with the twin group.

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

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.

You will need to get practical information about your twin community so your group knows what to expect during your visit. Use the questions at the end of this document to help guide your research.

Collect information about your own community

- Find out about festivals, youth conferences, and any other events scheduled for the time your group hosts.
- 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 websites and maps. After you've discussed the information, print copies, and 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?

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.”

Twinning on interests

Usually, you twin based on 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. See the twin-matching questionnaire on the group leader website for an example.

Buddying

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.

Another language

If you are involved in a bilingual exchange, know each participant’s ability to speak and understand the other language. It is 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.” - Group Leader

Write

Have youth 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.

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.

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.”

Twins can also connect via videoconferencing platforms. Group leaders can set up large group, small group, and one on one discussions and activities through these platforms between twinned groups. Organize games between twins online using online game apps to help break the ice before travelling and hosting.

Publicity

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.

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.

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 News Release

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)

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 Politicians

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

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)

Online Platforms

Raise awareness

You can create a larger following from your communities by using social media platforms. 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:



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

#YExplore #YConnect #YEngage #YExchanges

Connecting with your group

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.

Connecting with your twin

Many exchange groups use online platforms to connect with their twin before travel and hosting. Consider setting up games together online or facilitating conversations through videoconferencing platforms. See Part 4 – Exploring Culture for more information on connecting with your twin on the group leader website.

Digital Best Practices and Tips for Safety

Policies

- Review your organization's virtual engagement policy
- Use official school or organization accounts

Online environment

- Discuss expectations (e.g. camera on, camera off, background, acceptable behaviour, etc.)
- Review instructions on how to use the platform

Safe online meetings

- Where possible, videos are enabled at the beginning of the session to verify participants, keeping in mind not all participants may have access to cameras.
- Have at least two group leaders over the age of majority designated as administrators for the page, online group, or virtual meeting
- Make virtual meetings and sessions password protected.
- Remind participants that they should not be sharing the session links or passwords with anyone.
- Break-out rooms should be monitored and circulated by group leaders
- Ask for permission before recording meetings

Recording sessions

- When recording is to occur, inform all participants ahead of time and seek their permission (ask them to each put acceptance in the chat)
- If a participant disagrees and does not want to be recorded, they can turn the camera off and change their display name. It may be the host that needs to change the name. Group leaders should adjust settings where possible to only display attendees with their cameras turned on.

Example Activity

Main Areas of Learning

Use these questions with the group or give them to the group to use as they research, plan, study, set learning objectives or organize activities. *Developed by EquityLogi*

Youth in the community

- How do older community members perceive youth?
- Are there programs specifically designed for youth in your community? What are they?
- Do most youth remain in this community after high school?
- Are there many summer jobs for young people? What type of work do young people do in the community both during the school year and the summer?
- Are there post-secondary opportunities in the community (colleges, trade schools, universities)?

Socio-economic issues and the local economy

- Is there poverty, homelessness, and unemployment in the community?
- How do these problems compare with rates in other Canadian communities?
- How has the community identified and responded to social issues?
- What are the main industries? Who are the main employers?

Sport and recreation

- What sports are played in the community in both the summer and winter?
- Are there organized leagues for these sports?
- What recreation facilities are used?
- Where do people go hiking? swimming?
- What types of recreational services are available to children, youth, adults, seniors?

Local politics

- What are the similarities and differences between your community and your twin's community? (i.e., same political party in power, politicians are all men etc.)
- What are the local hot political topics?
- Are there other power centres besides elected officials? What are these?

- Is there a band council in your community? How are band leaders and band chief chosen?
- How do local people bring about change?
- Are women, Indigenous peoples, ethno-racial minorities represented in the community's political system?

Gender and diversity

- Are there clear gender roles within your twin's family? What about your family?
- What roles do women and men play in the community? How are these roles gendered?
- Describe different jobs that are held by men and women. How is this similar or different to your community?
- Are there opportunities for people with disabilities? Are most services, such as public transport, movie theatres, and recreation centers wheelchair accessible?
- What are the different racial, linguistic and ethnic groups in your community? What is the demographic make-up of your twin's community? How is it different from your community?

Local education

- Are there language minority schools (French, English, Indigenous languages) in the community? Are there immersion schools?
- Are there alternative education systems such as private schools, home schooling? How much is the tuition at private and alternative schools?
- What are some of the current issues facing the local educational system? How has this community responded to these issues?
- Is dropping-out of high school a problem? What is the drop-out rate?

Local health issues

- How many hospitals or clinics are available?
- What are the main health problems?
- What support is offered to seniors and community members with disabilities?

Indigenous peoples in the community

- Is there a friendship centre in your community? What are its main activities?
- Is there a local band council? What is its role? How are the members selected?
- Are Indigenous people represented at provincial or territorial and federal levels of government?
- What languages do the Indigenous communities speak?

- Are there separate schools for Indigenous students?
- Are Indigenous languages taught in the schools? Which ones?
- What local festivals are observed by Indigenous people?
- What key historical events or laws have influenced Indigenous people?
- What type of relationship do Indigenous people in your community have with other communities?

Culture

- What are the main cultural groups in the community?
- Are there any cultural centers in the community?

Religion

- What different religions are practiced in the community?
- What religious groups have places of worship in the community?
- Are there religiously based schools in the community? Are these schools publicly funded?

Environmental issues

- What are the environmental concerns?
- How does the community respond to these concerns?
- Who are the local people and organizations fighting to save the environment?
- Is tap water safe to drink?
- Where does drinking water come from?
- How does the community deal with garbage? What programs are in place? Is there a blue box program? Green box program?
- Does your school have an environmental club? What type of activities is it doing? How does this compare with your twin's school?