

## Frequently Asked Questions



### **Q. What is an Experiences Canada Exchange?**

**A.** An Experiences Canada Exchange is a reciprocal, homestay exchange between two groups of Canadian youth, each in a different part of Canada. Experiences Canada exchanges are enriching, enhance learning and give participants an experience that lasts a lifetime.

### **Q. How do I know if I am eligible to apply?**

**A.** The Experiences Canada Exchanges program is accessible to groups of youth comprised of a minimum of ten participants from a school or recognized community organization. The youth must be Canadian citizens, landed immigrants or have refugee status in Canada.

### **Q. What if I am an international student?**

**A.** International and visiting students can participate in our exchanges; however, the group must cover their costs.

### **Q. How old are the youth that participate?**

**A.** Experiences Canada Exchanges are designed for youth between the ages of 12 and 17 years.

### **Q. How long is an exchange?**

**A.** Exchanges are typically 7 to 10 days for each group (including 2 days of allotted travel time).

### **Q. Where can I travel on an exchange?**

**A.** Anywhere in Canada! Experiences Canada is active in all Canadian provinces and territories. Groups can request a specific destination or let our staff recommend one.

### **Q. When does our group travel and host?**

**A.** Exchanges can take place any time of the year. Once approved for funding, the two groups discuss and agree on travel and hosting dates. Experiences Canada will then coordinate the travel arrangements.

### **Q. Do students miss school?**

**A.** Yes, depending on the travel and hosting weeks, students could miss school. However, Experiences Canada, participating schools, and community associations recognize that experiential learning is a valuable complement to the school setting.

### **Q. How do I find a group to twin with?**

**A.** If you already know of a group that you would like to exchange with, you can indicate their name and address on your application. Otherwise our staff will

find a group for you by identifying a group that matches your own group's demographics and interests. Twinning groups is based on compatible group size, ages of youth and gender balance, as well as on similar themes or interests. Other factors in twinning groups include equitable provincial and territorial distribution, group participation history and budget considerations. Please note that identifying a group on your application does not automatically guarantee approval; Experiences Canada must still consider all of the factors mentioned above.

**Q. How do I apply for an exchange?**

A. Applications are completed and submitted on-line at by the Group Organizer.

**Q. When is the deadline to apply for an exchange?**

A. There is no deadline - Group Organizers can apply at any time during the year. We do suggest applying at least 4 months prior to your intended travel dates.

**Q. When will I know if my application is accepted?**

A. As soon as you submit an application online, you will receive an automated e-mail acknowledging receipt of your application. Generally, groups applying for a summer exchange are advised of their funding approval in early March. Groups applying for a school-year exchange are advised of their funding approval in early September.

**Q. Does Experiences Canada provide any kind of training to Group Organizers?**

A. Experiences Canada provides on-going support and guidance throughout the exchange planning process. Once the groups have accepted their proposed twin group, Experiences Canada also coordinates a comprehensive orientation conference call with both group organizers to help you successfully plan your exchange. A detailed Group Organizer Handbook and how-to videos further ensure that Group Organizers are well versed in what it takes to have a successful exchange.

**Q. How much will an exchange cost and who pays these costs?**

A. Each group pays a membership fee upon submitting an application, and then a per participant registration fee once an exchange has been approved and confirmed. The travel costs between community airports are paid for by Experiences Canada with funding from Exchanges Canada at the Department of Canadian Heritage. Participants are, however, liable for the full price of the ticket if they cancel and the group is not able to find a replacement up to 1 week prior to scheduled travel. In such cases, Experiences Canada will invoice the participant. The cost of local activities and excursions during the exchange is paid for by the groups through self-financing. The average cost per youth varies from \$150-\$500 depending on the activities and excursions chosen. Many groups organize fundraising events to help cover the cost of activities and local transportation when hosting their twin group.

**Q. What kinds of activities are involved?**

A. The types of activities you do with your twin group should generally reflect the local culture, community, and history of where your group is located. Current guidelines from Canadian Heritage require that a minimum of 30% of each exchange week's activities be historical or heritage related. Additional activities may reflect specific thematic exchanges and can be organized accordingly for music, sports, leadership, outdoor education, anti-bullying discussions, and more. In collaboration with the twin group organizer, each group designs a hosting week program that shows off their own community and meets the objectives of each group's exchange learning plan and Canadian Heritage's guidelines. Please note that all participants in both groups must participate in all activities during both halves of the exchange.

**Q. Who chooses the participants who get to go on the exchange?**

A. Each group chooses their own participants. Groups may consist of students in an existing school class or youth from a community association such as dance troupes, music clubs, sports teams, Scouts, Girl Guides, Boys and Girls Clubs, and others.

**Q. How do I twin the youth?**

A. Group Organizers develop twinning criteria together and a plan to facilitate good matches based on individual profiles, ages, interests, as well as on any allergies, medical concerns and/or special needs.

**Q. Who arranges the travel and how do we get to our destination?**

A. Experiences Canada pays for and arranges your group's travel by airplane, train or coach based on your requested dates. Experiences Canada will also arrange the airport transfer buses if your school is located 100 km or farther from the nearest airport. Groups who are closer to the airport organize their own airport transfers; however, Experiences Canada will reimburse them for this cost upon presentation of official invoices.<sup>1</sup>

**Q. Where do we stay when we visit our twin group?**

A. Experiences Canada exchanges are intended to be a reciprocal, homestay experience. Each youth participant is billeted in his or her selected twin's home; likewise, adult chaperones are expected to host each other. If there are circumstances in which a group is unable to billet in homes, either for cultural, space and/or safety and security reasons, it is possible to request and plan a common stay arrangement.

**Q. How do I know the host family stay will be safe?**

A. The safety and security of our exchange participants is Experiences Canada's number one priority. All host families must complete a strict screening process

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that Experiences Canada's financial year is in line with the Government of Canada, therefore, all invoices must be submitted by February 15th in order to be reimbursed.

which includes providing references and/or having a home visit by the Group Organizer. We believe that the host family experience is a positive learning opportunity and creates a connection between the youth that would only occur outside of structured activities.

**Q. Who is required to obtain Police Checks?**

A. All group organizers and chaperones are required to obtain a Police Record and Vulnerable Sector Check. All members of the host family who are over the age of 18 are also required to obtain a police record and vulnerable sector check.

**Q. How do I obtain a Police Record and Vulnerable Sector Check?**

A. To obtain the Police Record and Vulnerable Sector Check please visit your local police department.

**Q. Do I need to bring anything with me to complete the Police Record Check?**

A. Please bring photo ID and the volunteer letter which can be found in the Experiences Canada secure website.

**Q. What kind of insurances do I need to get?**

A. All Experiences Canada participants are covered by a group accident insurance plan during the two weeks of their exchange. Travel or cancellation insurance, which includes emergency hospital/medical insurance, is not part of Experiences Canada's plan however it can be purchased directly from our travel provider, or through family plans or independent insurance providers.

**Q. What if there are any behavioral issues or other emergencies while on exchange?**

A. Although an Experiences Canada representative is always available to discuss situations, the Group Organizers are responsible for the day-to-day supervision and overall group management. All emergencies and/or incidents are to be dealt with in a timely, appropriate and professional manner by the Group Organizer or another responsible adult from their school or organization. If there is an emergency situation while on exchange, please inform our staff at your first opportunity by calling the emergency phone line number that will be provided to you.

**Q. What if I have youth that have special needs?**

A. We strongly believe that all youth should have equal access to participation in Experiences Canada Exchanges. As such we provide limited funding to support the inclusion of youth with special needs or disabilities, from low-income households, rural or isolated areas and other needs on a case-by-case basis.

**Q. What if I have other questions?**

A. Experiences Canada staff are available Monday through Friday from 8:30am-4:30pm (Eastern Standard Time) to answer any and all of your questions.