

Rotary Short Term Exchange Program (STEP) - Frequently Asked Questions

When is the application due?

Completed applications for the upcoming exchange year are due by January 30. They are to be mailed to:

Rotary Youth Exchange (STEP)
200 W 34th Ave Box 393
Anchorage Alaska 99503

Why is it called an exchange program?

You will be matched with a student of the same gender in a country of your preference. The two of you will spend an agreed upon time together – half of that time in your home and half of the time in their home. Typical visitations are 3-4 weeks each way. It will be up to you and your foreign host family to agree upon the actual dates of the exchange. Usually, our students fly to their host country first, and then bring their host brother or sister back with them to complete the exchange. However, you may also agree to host first then travel abroad second.

Is proficiency in a foreign language needed?

No. The program is cultural in nature but is also for a short period of time. Many countries throughout the world teach English as a second language and most participating students are quite proficient in speaking English. If you have taken a foreign language in high school and elect to visit a country that speaks that language, you will be able to gain some conversational ability. Most students do not find language to be a barrier to having a great exchange experience.

What is so special about Rotary's Short Term Exchange Program compared to other programs?

The Rotary International Short Term Exchange Program is volunteer driven. It is organized and administered by volunteer Rotarians throughout the world. The operation is done at several levels; namely the local Rotary Club, the district and the regional levels. They screen the students, prepare them, arrange hosting abroad, insurance, etc. All this work is done by Rotarians as a service. They are not paid to provide this service. At times of immediate need, students who are away from home will be more comfortable knowing that Rotarians will be available to help and offer guidance.

Is this a mutual exchange?

Yes, a student will live with a foreign family for approximately 3-4 weeks. When he or she returns, the host brother or sister will also fly back with the student and stay with the U.S. student's family. The stay here will also be for approximately 3-4 weeks.

May my student select which country to go to?

Every effort will be given to match a student with his/her first choice of countries, *but cannot be guaranteed*. Availability of foreign students varies year-by-year. We have a good track record at matching students with one of their top 3 country choices. NOTE: Over the past 25 years Rotary District 5010 has had long term exchanges with 40 plus countries around the world. We will work with our exchange partners and students to find locations that are involved in the short term program.

May I request which gender my student may exchange with?

Yes, in fact we will obligate ourselves to your choice. The application form contains the following: "the family can host: boy/ girl/ or either."

May I choose from multiple host family options?

No. You will be provided with a host family application which meets your gender and country preference, and to the extent possible will also have a host brother or sister with similar interests. We also watch for critical issues such as a family who will accommodate special needs if necessary (dietary, allergy related). If you reject the application for non-critical reasons, you risk your chance of being provided a match.

Exchange Dates

The actual dates of the exchange will be coordinated by you and your host family. Typically, summer exchange programs occur during June, July, and August when you are out of school.

If you choose to make an exchange with a country in the southern hemisphere, then your exchange partner may expect to come here during their long summer break in December and January.

Normally you will travel to your host country first, and then bring your host brother or sister back with you for the second half of the exchange. Or, you may agree to host first then travel to your host country second. It all depends on each family's schedule.

What is the expected timeframe to finalize these arrangements?

February 28th to April 30th: Matches are arranged. Finding a match in the country of your choice is the responsibility of the Short Term Exchange committee members. Once your application and program fee is received we begin an immediate search for a match in the country of your choice.

- ✓ The matching process is dependent upon; 1. When applications are received. 2. The number of applications received. 3. The gender of applicants.
- ✓ Your application information is shared with our contacts overseas. They in turn share information about their applicants with us.
- ✓ Once a potential match is found we contact you to confirm the match.
- ✓ The host family's information is shared with you so you can begin the process of coordinating the dates of your particular exchange.
- ✓ Once you and the host family agree upon the dates of your exchange you would then book your flight.
- ✓ Very Important: Before booking your flights, be sure you and the host family have unconditionally agreed upon the dates of the exchange. If you, or the foreign student, cancel the exchange after booking your flights you could stand to lose all, or a portion of, your airline ticket cost. Cancellation of your airline tickets would be subject to the terms agreed to with the airline you choose.
- ✓ March: Orientation Meetings are held. These meetings are mandatory. You and at least one of your parents or guardians are required to attend.
- ✓ June: The fun begins. Students either fly overseas or prepare to receive their visiting brother or sister.

How does the flight get booked?

Once you and your matched family have decided on dates, contact your travel agent or an online travel site to make flight arrangements. The cost of the round-trip airfare is your responsibility.

How much does it cost?

- **\$400 Administration Fee** which includes the cost of processing application and background checks, supplemental Life and Medical insurance while abroad, and orientation meeting. Exchanges longer than 30 days in a foreign country will have an additional \$150 fee to cover extended Travel Insurance.

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- **Administration Refund Policy:** In the rare instance that a match is not found for the application we will refund all but \$100.00 of the Administration Fee. The \$100.00 is used to cover completed background checks and other miscellaneous costs associated with our attempts to find matches for our students.
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- Cost of round-trip airfare from your home to the foreign country. Airfare costs have run anywhere from \$1,500 to \$2,500 depending on your destination and the number of connecting flights necessary to get to complete your travel.
 - Let your Rotary Coordinator know your travel dates as soon as they are confirmed. Insurance coverage needs to be arranged to cover the specific dates you are traveling.
 - There is also the cost of having a guest in your house for 3-4 weeks and the additional cost of any excursions or events you may attend.
 - If you stay abroad longer than 30 days, you will be responsible for additional insurance fees (\$150 per month) which will be incurred to cover the participant while abroad. This is mandatory insurance required by the receiving Rotary Club / country.
 - You must obtain a passport and visitor visa (if required). Passports must be valid for at least six months after your exchange is complete.
 - Provide your own spending money for the duration of the exchange.

What are the host family's obligations?

You are expected to treat your host student as you would your own child. It is also appropriate to entertain the student beyond the normal family activities to give him/her the best opportunity to experience American culture. For example, family vacations to a summer cottage, a relative's home, or even another state are normal. Room, board, travel expenses incurred in the States are paid for by the host family as they would if the visiting student were a normal family member. Special outings to the zoo, to a baseball game, to a museum, etc. should also be provided. American students should have NO job commitments during the exchange period so they can spend time with their foreign students. We have found that our students are treated first class when they travel abroad. We would like the American host family to reciprocate with a first class experience for the foreign students.

What responsibility does the local Rotary Club have?

Each Rotary Club **MUST** interview the student applicant to insure he or she will be a good ambassador for their community. The Rotary Club is also responsible for ensuring the student's home is appropriate to host the inbound student. The Rotary Club President and Youth Exchange Officer **MUST** sign the application. The Rotary Club and student should remain in contact during the exchange. Both students should make every effort to attend a local Rotary meeting during the exchange and should be able to speak about their experiences.

Am I expected to attend an orientation?

We strive to do an Orientation via the internet sometime in March, ahead of summer departures. The student and at least one parent are encouraged to attend the orientation session

How much money should the student take?

Again, this will be a personal issue. It will be up to the student and family to decide what works best in their own situation. Students have been known to leave with \$200.00 and come back with \$150.00.

They've also been known to leave with \$2,000.00 and call home for more. This must be a personal decision based upon the individual's situation.

My student has graduated from high school. May she/he still apply?

Yes, the age limits are from 15 to 19.

May the student participate in this program more than once?

Yes, they may even want to apply for the long term exchange after visiting a country for the summer. We believe the short term summer exchange can complement the 11-month long term exchange program.