

# Youth Programs in Rotary Int

Rotary has a heavy commitment to youth and has over time created a wide suite of programs related to youth LTEP, STEP, RYLA, and Ambassadorial Scholarships. In North America there are the Adventures programs and in Europe, Camps and Tours are popular. There's also Interact, Rotaract and Rotex. There are others but these some of the better known ones. It is through these programs that Rotary should hope to appeal to the youth of the world and build future Rotarians. Each has its own specific purpose or goal but the one we use for Youth Exchange is implied in all of them. To encourage peace, good will, and understanding in the world. I'm going to review the Short Term Exchange Program, how it works, how to prepare students for going abroad, and its value to Rotary. Between Ronda's presentation and mine we hope to set the stage for discussion on what we can realistically expect to train students and family for the STEP Program.

## What is STEP

**For the purposes of this presentation I'm going to refer to the more classical family to family Short-Term Exchange we're all familiar with. Short term exchanges also include Camps, Tours and New Generations but there's not enough to fully address them here. STEP involves students traveling to another country to stay with an exchange partner, living with that family for 3 to 6 weeks and then returning with the exchange partner and hosting them for a similar period of time. Matches are based on the student's country of preference, age, gender, hobbies and interests. Age criteria varies but is usually between 15 to 18 years.**

**The purpose of the program is:**

- **To promote international peace, goodwill and understanding through a family-to-family international exchange.**
- **To provide the opportunity for students to experience international travel and experience life with foreign host families.**
- **To promote Rotary among Youth and to generate future Rotarians.**

STEP is not as popular as LTEP with Rotary clubs and has never had the same numbers. I think world wide there are somewhere in the neighborhood of 1,500 STEP exchanges annually. However it has advantages in allowing students who cannot commit to a full year of exchange to be exposed to other cultures and gain a better sense of the world. The premise is that long-term students should not be the only ones to benefit from our exchange programs.

## Advantages and Promotion of STEP

**Advantages:**

- Is usually done in the summertime and does not interfere with student's home academic program
- Does not require strong language preparation. Although we hope!!!!
- Offers flexibility in choosing when participants go, however that depends on the Country.

- Has a Lesser time commitment for the families involved.
- Has a strong family involvement and connection.
- Creates one-on-one friendships and bonds.
- Allows students to show their country to others.
- Is not as costly to the Rotary Club.
- Does not require Clubs to find Host Families.
- Allows clubs to send more than one student.
- Exposes students to exchanges that might later try LTEP
- Does not require visa's with the exception of South America.

### Ways of promotion:

- Present and Promote in Schools.
- Provide information on websites through Districts.
- Promote in newspapers and media.
- Through Interact and other school clubs and through RYLA.
- Invite participants to Rotary Meetings.
- Need to sell to the Clubs. And state the advantages above.
- Distribute brochures available through RI
- Use Former exchange students in presentations.

### Organizing a District STEP Program:

1. Decide what type of short-term program you wish to organize.
2. Determine countries with which you want to work. What's popular in your area.
3. Start making International partners well in advance. **(September)** Get commitment on numbers of exchanges with your international partners. Begin with a few and expand slowly. Use the RI list (RI Secretariat) of District Youth Exchange chairs and multidistrict officers for contact.
4. Begin promotion of the program with Students 9-10 months prior to scheduled departures **(September)**.
5. Obtain or develop brochures/promotional material that list the guidelines for your program.
6. Promote with the Clubs and emphasize the ease of starting such a program, the value of youth exchange and low cost of the program.
7. Set final dates for applications **(December 31)**.
8. Ensure that clubs pre-screen the applications and interview the students.
9. Set criteria for Country placement and review final applications and select students.
10. Arrange an orientation session for all potential participants. Ask former participants to attend and share their experiences and answer questions. **(January-February)**
11. Ensure that adequate training is provided on Abuse and Harassment is provided to all participants.
12. Finalize host family placements with your foreign counterparts. **(January to mid-May)** Not all exchanges are connected on the first try. Students may not be able to match time frames, may have different interests. Be prepared to be flexible.
13. Once finalized, send your foreign counter-part copies of applications. (Use of PDF)
14. Send your students further information on the exchange, such as the country, host family contact information, rules of the country's program, etc.
15. Offer travel information for your participants with an experienced Travel Agent.
16. Verify that all participants (both inbound and outbound) have adequate insurance.
17. Confirm travel arrangements and travel dates.
18. Once the student has returned from abroad, follow-up with feedback via an evaluation form. RI has developed lots of resources for the program.
19. Keep good records of all activities. Abuse and harassment.

# Training and Preparing the STEP Student & Family.

## Orientation

Orientation is as important for a short-term exchange program as it is for a long-term program. Since the students are traveling abroad for a much shorter period of time and may not face the same challenges, the orientation does not need to be as lengthy. All of the basics should be covered though. All outbound students and one parent **MUST** attend. Remember to invite past participants.

Topics for a one-day orientation are outlined below.

- **• What is Rotary?**
- **You as ambassador This is an exchange.**
- **Abuse & Harassment prevention program must be incorporated and explained to the families.**
- **Travel arrangements**
  - Inoculation requirements
  - Travel documents, Passports, visa etc.
  - Making changes and cancellations
- **Insurance requirements**
  - Costs considerations and financial considerations.
  - Rules and regulations of the Exchange program. 4 D's
  - Language skills.
  - Safety and the Law
  - Health and medical considerations.
  - Cultural differences - Culture and Culture shock. "I have not learned to appreciate blood sausage yet".
  - Responsibilities and activities of a student. Planning your exchange partners visit.
  - Students and host families. On being a family member. "First Night" questions.
  - Contact with Home and friends. Internet use.
  - Host Family Gifts, pins etc.
  - Key contacts for problems while away.
  - Include Past participants' and their experiences with country-specific information.

The Short-term program does not require the intensive training of the LTEP but key elements are still necessary to ensure a good exchange and safe travel.

## Follow-up and Evaluation.

**Ensure that the exchange happens.** You are making a commitment to your foreign Rotary partner and their students and you need to make sure that that the students are in contact, that the match is a good one and that it happens. Because the commitment is not as large as the Long-term program it may be easier for your students to quit. Keep on top of it. My final check-off involves knowing when flights have been confirmed.

**Evaluation of the program.** Upon return (September) talk with the students and ask them how the exchange worked. Ask about the training you provided, the travel assistance from the agent, about their expectations and whether they were met. Would they help with the program as volunteers

next year? If you want you can evaluate your program using the RI evaluation form but send to both the inbound and outbound.

- The most valuable tool you have is direct feedback from program participants.
- Evaluate your short-term program annually. What's working and what's not.
- Are exchanges with specific foreign partners working? What issues keep coming up. Are there failures and what is causing them. Work with your foreign partner to solve for the following year.

## **Making connections and working with other Countries.**

- STEP is similar to LTEP in many ways.
- RI publishes a list of all Youth Exchange contacts every year through the RI Secretariat. STEP countries are listed there. You can contact either STEP Chairs or YE Chairs in Districts and Multi Districts.
- Send out queries showing interest. Expect that a lot will not reply at first. Districts are busy, but keep trying.
- Start slow and build as you have confidence with a particular country and its needs.
- When you make a connection make commitments that you can keep. Number of students, time frames, realistic costs for students.
- Ensure all paperwork is handled expeditiously. Don't hang onto things.
- Remember that not all individual exchanges connect on the first try and sometimes it takes two or three tries to find a specific match for a student. If you are dealing with an experienced STEP coordinator they will understand this. In general we are limited in the amount of information in the applications. Keep trying. This is your commitment to that exchange Country. I've probably learned as much about other countries and their culture from dealing with my exchange partners as our students have. And I'm sure it's mutual.

## **• Summary and Questions**

STEP provides an avenue for students that cannot do a full year to be exposed to international travel as a Rotary Ambassador. Some key elements to think about.

- **Is an important tool in Rotary's goal to promote international peace, good will and understanding.**
- **Can help build possible future generations of Rotarians or at the least expose young people to Rotary.**
- **Has advantages that LTEP does not and is easy to promote, both with clubs and students.**
- **Setting up a program at the District level is fairly easy but does takes time.**
- **Make commitments we can keep with our Exchange partners.**
- **Training is not as intense but is similar to LTEP and must be adequate to provide safety for the student as required by RI new guidelines.**
- **Abuse and Harassment training is just as important as LTEP.**
- **Follow-up and Review are key elements in ensuring that the program stays healthy and robust.**
- **We must document all that we now do in youth exchange.**

**Both Ronda and I have presented you with the two pieces of the issue. General preparation for Short Term students and meeting the Certification criteria for STEP. The original question presented to us was “What are the basic orientation needs and can they be realistically accomplished”. I think we have given you a good overview of the Orientation needs from both a certification and general perspective. We would now like to hear from you and will lead discussion on what you think is realistic on specific areas. This can then be given back to RI for advice.**