

Youth Exchange Certification Frequently Asked Questions

May 2006



What is Rotary International's zero-tolerance policy on abuse and harassment?

Zero tolerance means that your district considers even one incident of abuse or harassment to be unacceptable, and commits to treating every incident as a serious matter.

Some requirements in the Rotary Code of Policies may not be permissible under local law or are not available in my country or state/province. What must my district do?

The *Rotary Code of Policies*, Section 41.080, indicates that should local circumstances prevent a district from meeting any one of the requirements, the district must notify the general secretary in writing, provide documentation, and propose alternate procedures that maintain the intent of the requirements.

Please attach explanations to your district's Certification Application. The written description should fully explain the specific circumstances that prohibit your district from meeting the requirement, along with the alternate procedures your district has developed to maintain the intent of the requirement.

My district has received many documents related to youth protection and certification for Youth Exchange. Which policy elements are requirements, and which are recommended guidelines?

The *Youth Exchange 2006-07 Certification Application* lists required policy elements drawn from *Rotary Code of Policies*, Sections 2.110 and 41.080. The Board also approved certain requirements for certification that are found in the application, such as reporting criminal allegations and serious incidents to RI within 72 hours, completion of the Annual Survey, general liability insurance, and incorporation of districts, multidistricts, or Youth Exchange programs.

The *Youth Exchange Sample District Abuse and Harassment Prevention Policy* and its appendices are recommended resources developed to assist districts in implementing or revising policies and procedures to help protect Youth Exchange students.

If you have specific questions about whether a specific policy element is a requirement or a recommended guideline, please contact the RI Youth Exchange staff.

Who must submit to background checks?

Background checks must be conducted for *all adult participants in the program who have direct unsupervised contact with one or more Youth Exchange students.*

A *participant* in the district Youth Exchange program is a person who fills a particular role within the club or district program. This may include, for example, Rotarian counselors, host families, and club and district Youth Exchange committee members. In general, “participant” does not include members of the host community whom a student may meet through his or her daily activities, such as teachers, neighbors, friends from school or community sports coaches. A “participant” generally does not extend to those without direct contact, such as club secretaries.

Many Rotarians have inquired about Rotarians giving rides to students to and from Rotary club meetings. Students are particularly vulnerable when they are alone in a vehicle, making adequate screening of those adults critical. It is recommended that a smaller number of club members be screened to assume this role or that arrangements be made to avoid a situation in which one adult drives one student. One way this could be accomplished includes arranging for an adult driving students to be accompanied by another adult.

What level of criminal background check is sufficient to meet the RI requirement?

Each district should determine, based on local law and practice, what level of background check meets the minimum requirement in an appropriate way. Districts are encouraged to consult a local legal professional to ensure that their screening procedures adhere to local law and practice. Districts may also wish to communicate with local youth-serving organizations and/or child protection agencies to learn about the resources available in the community for screening volunteers.

For purposes of district certification a criminal background check will, at minimum, provide information on an individual’s criminal record as reported by governmental authorities so that a decision may be made as to the appropriateness of a volunteer candidate. Rotary International does not have information on the effectiveness of various background check levels in each community participating in Youth Exchange. In some areas, local law and practice may indicate that a state/province level check is appropriate, for example; in other areas, local law and practice may indicate that a national check is appropriate.

If local circumstances prevent your district from performing background checks, your district must develop alternative screening methods that meet the intent of the requirement. Each district must determine which alternatives will meet the district’s responsibilities toward students and other participants under local law and practice.

The alternatives must provide an additional level of screening beyond the other screening elements already required. For example, conducting a home visit for a prospective host family is not an adequate alternative to conducting background checks because home visits are part of the regular screening requirements and therefore do not add an additional level of screening. *The*

alternatives your district develops should be described on a separate sheet of paper included with your district's Certification Application.

How long should my district retain information gathered during the volunteer selection process, such as results of background checks?

While not required, Rotary International suggests that districts maintain all records of criminal background checks, waivers, and screening for adults working with minors in perpetuity. This recommendation is in place to help ensure that districts will have as much information as possible should reports of abuse or harassment be raised many years after an exchange has been completed. Districts should consider how privacy laws and statutes of limitations might influence record maintenance. Each district is encouraged to consult a local legal professional and adopt an appropriate procedure.

Are unannounced home visits for host families a requirement or a recommended guideline?

Announced and unannounced (unscheduled) home visits prior to and during the exchange are part of the certification program. The intent of unscheduled home visits is to help ensure that the host home is evaluated based on real day-to-day living conditions rather than on idealized living conditions that may be created in advance of a scheduled home visit. The requirement is also meant to institute monitoring throughout the exchange that will help ensure that appropriate standards are maintained for the duration of the student's stay in the home.

If unscheduled home visits are unacceptable according to local practice for organizations that place youth in host families, foster homes, or other live-in arrangements, the unscheduled home visits may be replaced with visits conducted with short notice, such as calling to ask to stop by for a visit later the same day. In some areas, families who accept responsibility for youth may be expected to agree to requirements not normally acceptable under general social norms.

The Rotary Code of Policies states that students must be given contact information for two non-Rotarian resource persons (one male and one female). What is the role of a non-Rotarian resource person, and who should these people be?

The two non-Rotarian resource persons should be individuals to whom students can go with concerns if they feel they cannot talk to their club or district Youth Exchange contacts or Rotary in general. In addition to having resources in case of emergency, students should have people they can talk to if they have a non-emergency concern or if they are afraid to talk with a medical professional, law enforcement, etc. While students can generally have this need met within the club or district Youth Exchange structure, there could be many reasons students may feel they cannot find help within the program.

Typical examples for non-Rotarian contact persons would be a school counselor, a teacher, or a former Youth Exchange student. Districts may choose to provide the same two non-Rotarian contacts to all students. The contact persons need not be full participants in the district Youth Exchange program the way a Rotarian counselor or a club Youth Exchange chair is; rather, they should provide an outside perspective for students who need it.

What training must my district provide for Youth Exchange program participants? When will the training manual from RI be available?

Districts must provide abuse prevention and awareness training for club and district Youth Exchange committee members, and all participants in Youth Exchange, including counselors, host families, students (outbound and inbound), and parents and legal guardians of outbound students. While districts are required to conduct training or assure that appropriate training is completed, they are not required to use materials provided by RI. *The Abuse and Harassment Prevention Training Manual* will be available in June/July 2006. It is intended to be a resource for districts to use in developing or augmenting their own training materials.

I understand that clubs and districts must provide support services for a student who reports abuse or harassment. Does this mean that my district must appoint a lawyer for the student?

Each district is encouraged to consult local social service agencies to discuss local standards and resources for providing support to young people who report abuse or harassment. Districts are encouraged to establish parameters for what the district is willing and able to cover in providing or initiating contact with an independent lawyer, therapist, or counselor. Note that districts are not specifically required to hire a lawyer for a student.

The Youth Exchange Sample District Abuse and Harassment Prevention Policy states that all cases of sexual abuse or harassment must be immediately reported to the appropriate law enforcement authorities. Does this mean that the police must be notified when a student reports that a Youth Exchange volunteer told the student an inappropriate joke?

Rotarians bear responsibility for the safety and well-being of Youth Exchange participants. A district's approach to reports of abuse or harassment is an essential element in supporting and protecting students.

All allegations of abuse or harassment in Youth Exchange must be reported to appropriate law enforcement authorities. What constitutes an appropriate law enforcement authority may vary from one community to another. In some areas, locally applicable law may designate a government agency for youth protection to receive reports of abuse or harassment, while police may be the appropriate authority in other areas. Some districts may determine that local law and practice permits the district to designate a trained youth protection officer to receive reports within the district and take responsibility for conveying reports to the appropriate authorities.

At times, a student may report being uncomfortable with conduct that does not rise to the level of reportable harassment under local law. It is important to remember that any unwelcome behavior of a sexual nature between a youth and a volunteer, regardless of age or majority of the student, is inappropriate. It is also important to remember that people who abuse youth often use jokes, sexually suggestive language, and other seemingly mild techniques to groom their victims. Most Rotarians and other adults involved in Youth Exchange are not trained professionals with expertise in determining the seriousness or legal implications of an allegation; therefore, they should not decide whether an allegation constitutes abuse or harassment unless the decision is

made in close consultation with youth protection service agencies, law enforcement, or a district youth protection officer trained in handling allegations of abuse or harassment toward young people.

For instances in which such consultation results in a determination that the conduct does not rise to the level of harassment, each district must document specific procedures to follow in addressing non-reportable allegations. Action must be taken to bring a stop to the inappropriate behavior and to prevent it from occurring in the future. All accusations and the steps taken to resolve them should be recorded so that behavior patterns can be tracked, and the perspectives of all parties involved in the incident should be documented. Districts should have policies for addressing patterns of problematic behavior that may emerge.

Each district is encouraged to consult a local legal professional regarding obligations and procedures for handling allegations of abuse and harassment.

Rotarians and other Youth Exchange volunteers should always remember that Youth Exchange students are entrusted to their care, and the students' safety and well-being is the first priority. When there is doubt about whether to report an incident, the incident should be reported.

When there is an allegation of abuse toward a student, must the student's parents or legal guardian be notified?

Yes. In many instances, a student who reports abuse is a minor according to the laws of the host and/or sponsor country. Even if the student is not a minor, parents place their children in the care of the district Youth Exchange program. Parents or legal guardians must be notified when there is a report of abuse or harassment regardless of the student's wishes. Also, the district is encouraged to secure written approval from the student's parents or legal guardians to remain on the exchange.

The *Youth Exchange 2006-07 Certification Application* states that districts must provide a "hotline". What does this mean?

Districts must maintain an emergency telephone number or other means for ensuring that students can contact a district representative by telephone at all times. To meet this requirement, the telephone must be more than a phone number for one individual, as every person has times during which he or she cannot be reached (vacation/holiday, work hours, etc.). However, a system in which there is always an individual "on call" to respond to a district mobile phone or pager may provide the necessary support for the student. Each district should develop a method appropriate to its local needs and resources.

Who are the current members of the Rotary International staff working on Youth Exchange?

As of 3 April 2006, the Youth Exchange staff and responsibilities are as follows:

<p>Rotary Youth Exchange – PD110 RI Programs Division</p> <p>Rotary International One Rotary Center 1560 Sherman Avenue Evanston, Illinois 60201-3698, USA</p> <p>Fax: 1.847.866.6116 E-mail: youthexchange@rotary.org</p>	<p>Christine Evans, Supervisor, Youth Exchange Christine.Evans@rotary.org - 1.847.866.3422</p> <hr/> <p>Jill Wechtler, Senior Program Coordinator, Youth Exchange (certification-related inquiries) Jill.Wechtler@rotary.org – 1.847.866.3283</p> <p>Jessica Oldford, Program Coordinator, Youth Exchange (general inquiries) Jessica.Oldford@rotary.org – 1.847.866.3383</p> <p>Ellen Tierney, Program Correspondent, Youth Exchange (general inquiries) Ellen.Tierney@rotary.org – 1.847.866.3421</p>
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Please note that this information is subject to change. Please contact Youth Exchange staff to ensure that you have the most current copy.

(May 2006)