

GROUP STUDY EXCHANGE

AN INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE PROGRAM FOR YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

TIPS FOR HOSTING A TEAM

The success of a GSE team's tour depends upon the district's attention to the details of the exchange and advance planning of activities and accommodations.

Our district's clubs' financial responsibilities include:

- Meals and lodging for the team - responsibility of local hosts and clubs except at District Conference - see below
- Internal travel during the tour, including transport from and to the airport - responsibility of local hosts and clubs
- Public accommodations (hotels, motels, etc.) when necessary or when homestays are not available
- Participation in the district conference which the GSE team will be attending - hotel and meal package for the duration of the district conference are paid for by District 5300
- Team visit to Disneyland, although outside of District 5300, is allowed if transportation is and escorted by hosting clubs and entry is paid for by the district

All financial responsibilities above are in effect from the time the visiting team arrives in the host country.

Publicizing the Program

- Send news releases to leading newspapers throughout the district, explaining how the GSE program works and emphasizing the objective of international understanding.
- Emphasize the educational and ambassadorial purpose of a Group Study Exchange. Specify qualifications for team membership and highlight the importance of communication and language skills.
- Specify the country the team is from and the dates they will be in your area.
- Arrange for speakers at weekly Rotary club meetings to promote the program. Speakers may include past GSE team members and team leaders residing in the district and GSE subcommittee members.
- Network with Rotarians, other local residents, and international organizations whose members may have lived in the country the team is from.
- Request assistance from Rotarians who are in advertising or public relations.
- Advise local business, professional, and other groups that speakers are available to promote this international opportunity to potential team members.

Finding Host Families

Ask clubs to recommend potential host families and to provide their names, addresses, telephone and fax numbers, e-mail addresses, and any other useful information such as number of family members in the household, ages of children, and occupations of working family members. Ask clubs to send suggestions to the committee at least four months before the visiting team arrives. Consider creating a sign-up sheet where Rotarians can commit to hosting for specific dates and lengths of time.

Hosting teams in alternate accommodations

Program policy requires that our district host the GSE team in Rotarians' homes; however, this may not always be possible. If this is the case, the district must:

- Explain in your *GSE District Application* why your district cannot provide homestays.
- Be sure to inform the partner district that homestays will be difficult to arrange. The host district is responsible for covering the costs of alternate accommodations such as hotels or motels.
- Provide for the team to stay with families for at least part of the tour.
- Consider housing the team with families of former team members from your district.
- Inform your GSE coordinator at the Foundation of the situation.
- Seek cooperative organizations in your community that regularly provide homestays.

Tips for a successful GSE

- Prepare the host itinerary at least four months before the GSE study tour.
- GSE chairs should be in contact at least five months before the scheduled visit to plan their districts' activities.
- GSE teams should spend an adequate amount of time with host families.
- Ensure that all host clubs are trained and ready to accept a GSE team.

Preparing a Host Itinerary

The host itinerary is the most important part of our GSE planning. It is vital that our district plan this itinerary well in advance of the team's arrival. Moreover, our district is required to provide a final itinerary to the visiting team and Foundation at least *two months before the team's departure*.

Our itinerary is a location-by-location, day-by-day, hour-by-hour listing of the activities planned for the team's visit. First, prepare a general calendar and mark off the days of arrival and departure of the visiting team. Then account for:

• Five vocational study days per team member.

A GSE subcommittee member should be assigned to coordinate the vocational aspect of the exchange, including soliciting appropriate information from visiting team members to ensure that the visits agree with their expectations. Allow approximately 20 vocational days for a team of four non-Rotarian members. The five days required per member for vocational study need not be consecutive but can be separated, depending upon when members have opportunities to meet individually with representatives of their respective

fields. Vocational study days must match the professions of the individual team members. Failure to include adequate vocational days may jeopardize our district's future participation in GSE. **The importance of vocational study cannot be overemphasized.** It is often difficult for professionals to take an extended leave of absence from their jobs; valuable vocational visits reinforce to employers the specific professional benefits that GSE can bring to both the company/organization and the employee.

- **One or two days of complete, isolated rest** immediately following the welcoming ceremonies after the team's arrival and before the official study tour begins to help the team overcome jet lag. This rest period is required and must be in a quiet hotel rather than in Rotarians' homes. There should be no planned activities and as little Rotarian contact as possible. The district is responsible for expenses during this rest period.
- **At least a half day free** in the middle of each week and one free day each weekend for team members to relax. Free time means that no activities are planned for the team either by host Rotarians or host families. Thus, team members can rest, sleep, write letters home, shop, sightsee, or spend time with their host families if they wish.
- **A one- or two-day, mid-tour isolation period** at the host district's expense with no Rotarian contact — somewhere away from it all, perhaps in a quiet resort hotel — to provide the team an opportunity to compare impressions, assess the tour's progress, and strengthen team spirit.

Include an opportunity for the team leader to meet our GSE chair or DG, preferably right after the one- to two-day isolation period. This will allow time for frank discussion of any problems with the GSE and provide an opportunity to correct them.

The GSE subcommittee can plan a travel route for the visiting team, using the team's daily schedule of activities and a map of the host district that shows each Rotary club's location. In doing so, the subcommittee should remember:

- A study tour does not have to cover the entire district. Large districts, such as ours, may want to develop a plan so that over several years, various GSE teams will visit each region of the district in turn.
- The team must remain together at all times, except when it is with host families and possibly during vocational study days if one particular city cannot provide opportunities for all team members to study their individual professions.
- The amount of time the team spends with a host family is important, as this is typically one of the most rewarding aspects of a GSE. Team members should live with each host family from four to seven days. This will help them reduce travel fatigue and get to know their host families better.
- Avoid scheduling too many Rotary functions and do not plan more than three Rotary club meetings per week. Organize intercity or interclub meetings where possible.

Our GSE tours last four weeks.

The itinerary should include as many of the following sites as possible:

- *The city.* Local architecture, public transportation system, important buildings, historical sites

- *The country.* Areas of natural resources and scenic beauty, historical locations
- *Government.* Seats of government, discussions with officials
- *Justice system.* Judicial courts, law offices, prisons, police headquarters
- *Education.* Schools, colleges, and universities, technical institutes, ministry of education
- *Social services.* Government and voluntary welfare agencies, service institutions
- *Agriculture.* Animal and crop farms, dairies, ranches
- *Commerce.* Banks, shopping malls, stock brokerages, business establishments
- *Industry.* Manufacturing firms, food processing plants, local industrial trade centers
- *Research.* Laboratories, research and development institutions
- *Religion and culture.* Places of worship, museums, opera and concert halls, art galleries
- *Recreation and sports.* Resort, beach and recreational areas, sports arenas

At least two months before the visiting GSE team arrives, distribute the final program itinerary (with contact information) to:

- Our DG
- The DG of the sending district
- The GSE chair of the sending district
- Each club in our district
- Our district Rotarian who plans the district conference and assembly, intercity meetings, or other pertinent district meetings
- Media contacts that may be covering the GSE story
- Any interested non-Rotarian persons, agencies, or organizations
- Our GSE coordinator at the Foundation

Transporting the team

Arrange well in advance for the team's daily transportation as well as from one host club to another. All internal travel expenses are the host clubs' responsibility. Do not include any transportation or pleasure/sightseeing flights on noncommercial airplanes, as most insurance companies will not cover expenses incurred or a loss caused by or resulting from flying in a privately owned aircraft. Because of potential insurance and liability issues, team members and leaders may not operate a motor vehicle during the exchange. Teams must be accompanied by a host Rotarian while being transported throughout the host district.

Other planning tips

- Avoid duplication of activities. The program should be well-balanced and organized.
- Select area representatives who will ensure a problem-free tour in each area of the district that the team will visit.

- Select one Rotarian (perhaps a member of our GSE subcommittee) who will receive mail for the visiting team members and deliver it to them. Advise the sending district of this person's name and address before the team leaves so the information can be given to the visiting team members' families.
- Inform the visiting team of the names, addresses, e-mail addresses, and telephone numbers of the main host Rotarians and any other key personnel.
- Plan a meeting for the end of the visit to discuss the team's views on the host program.

Note: All of the itinerary's activities should take place within the host district's boundaries. In some cases, however, brief visits to areas outside the host district — usually to adjacent districts — are clearly beneficial to the team. This travel can be included in the itinerary on the condition that it:

- Relates clearly to one or more specific areas of interest included in the exchange (commerce, education, government, etc.)
- Does not obviously duplicate available resources in the host district
- Is included and explained in the draft itinerary sent to the GSE staff
- Does not exceed one or two days in duration
- Does not involve any costs that the host club(s) is/are not willing and able to absorb
- Occurs with the complete understanding and agreement of the other district(s) involved

Suggestions from former GSE participants

- Put team members together with hosts of the same profession, hobbies, or interests.
- Expose the team to people in the same age groups as the team members.
- Limit the number of areas team members visit so they can absorb life in your country without rushing from place to place.
- Plan reasonable workdays — not 12- to 15-hour days.
- Overlap the exchange with the outbound GSE team so that team members from both partner districts have some one-on-one time in both countries.
- Allow time to meet with Rotary Youth Exchange students and Ambassadorial Scholars while in the host district.
- Create more interaction with young people, especially college and high school students.
- Share profiles on the Rotary host families and provide photos.
- Include more vocational days.
- Include more time to join in the day-to-day life of hosts, possibly during Rotary projects.
- Provide an orientation and training for host families.
- Make sure that host districts schedule sufficient presentation time at Rotary dinner meetings.

Being a Good Host Family

GSE offers the opportunity for young professionals to study another country, its people, its culture, and its institutions through personal contacts with Rotarians and their families. Effective host families will:

Welcome the team member. If possible, one or more family members should be among the welcoming delegation that meets the GSE team upon arrival in our district. Families should introduce themselves to the team member(s) assigned to them and assure that they are looking forward to the visit. The host family is the first impression that team members have of our country, so they should feel welcome when they arrive.

Share their home and lifestyle. While the team member is living in local homes, there should be as little disruption of the daily routine as possible. Host families are encouraged to share their culture as it exists in everyday life. This does not mean elaborate parties and entertainment, but allowing the guest to participate in daily family activities, religious pursuits, community involvement, etc.

Allow for free time and rest. The team's itinerary should provide at least a half day free in the middle of each week and one full free day on each weekend for the team member to rest, write letters home, shop, sightsee, or spend time with the host family. If an evening "at home" is planned, your visitor might enjoy meeting small groups of the family's friends (not necessarily Rotarians). Team members should not be obligated to participate in family activities when rest time has been scheduled.

Be aware of language factors. Preparation and communication are key to the success of any GSE. District governors are encouraged to appoint a team leader who is proficient in the language.

If families have difficulty communicating with their guest, they should speak very slowly and pronounce each word distinctly, separate individual words, and avoid using colloquialisms. On occasion, it may be necessary to seek help from someone fluent in the guest's native language — the GSE team leader, a teacher, or a translator assigned by the host district's GSE subcommittee to provide this service, or perhaps a visitor from the guest's home country. Do not hesitate to do this; it will be appreciated by the team member, and it will aid communication between the guest and host family.

Provide for meals, laundry, and souvenirs. Unless otherwise stated in the team's itinerary, team members are usually not with their host families for lunch. Before the team member arrives, determine if he or she adheres to any dietary restrictions. Plan to serve breakfast each morning and dinner each evening (except when other evening functions, including dinner, are planned for the team). Be sure to serve breakfast early enough so that the team member can be available in time for the morning's first engagement; make similar plans for after-dinner engagements.

Keep in mind that as team members will be away from home for four weeks, doing laundry will be necessary. When the guest arrives, ask if there is any laundry to be done. At the conclusion of the guest's stay, the host family may exchange small but meaningful gifts or souvenirs. Something indicative of the region or country would be appropriate. Consider having a friend take pictures of the guest and the host family in their home or garden and provide copies to the team member before he or she departs.

When the Visiting Team Arrives

Our district has spent many hours planning an itinerary that is perfectly suited for the visiting team. Communication between our district and the partner district has been open and frequent. All deadlines for submission of documents to RI World Headquarters were met. Our district is prepared to host a GSE team from another country. When the GSE team arrives in our district, be sure to give a big welcome. Arrange for Rotarians and host families to meet the team as it gets off the plane. This will set a positive precedent for the tour.

The briefing meeting

Brief the visiting team immediately after it arrives in our district, allowing some rest time for jet lag recovery. The session should include a review of the itinerary and an opportunity for team members to ask questions, make special requests, and discuss their expectations of the visit. District representatives should also explain their expectations, so any conflicts can be addressed right away. This can be an opportunity for team members to provide more details about their vocational goals so that the committee can adjust vocational day plans to ensure members an optimal experience. Also notify the team that it will be debriefed at the end of the study tour.

During the study tour

Maintain control of the program itinerary. Do not allow clubs to add extra, unplanned activities. Any additions could force cancellation of some previously planned activities and/or reduce the time allotted for the visiting team's rest and relaxation.

Check and double check that Rotarians responsible for meeting and/or transporting the team at various points along the route know exactly what is expected of them.

Cooperation at the Border Leads to Water Improvement Project

In April 2002, districts 4110 (Mexico) and 5520 (Texas, USA) embarked on a unique GSE that focused on water needs and problems on both sides of their countries' shared border. The teams initially worked together in the vicinity of El Paso, Texas, and Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, visiting government and private institutions responsible for water management operations. This GSE provided a Matching Grant proposal that continued to address and resolve water concerns of both countries and promoted future collaboration between the two Rotary districts.

The debriefing session

Many districts have found that holding an informal question-and-answer discussion involving team members, Rotarians, non-Rotarians, and members of the host district community near the end of the GSE is extremely helpful. It helps bring together the entire trip and focus on the goals of the GSE program, and is especially useful in identifying areas that can be improved in future GSEs. This debriefing should be led by the team leader, and the information should be compiled and presented as part of the team's final report to the host district and the GSE coordinator at the Foundation.

When the Visiting Team Departs

In the last four weeks, our district has provided many opportunities for the visiting team to learn more about our area of the world. The team has visited industries of interest, lived with Rotarian families, partaken of our country's foods and delicacies, made presentations to Rotarians and non-Rotarians throughout your district, and returned home with a new perspective on life. In addition to the debriefing session, our district should follow up on the following items.

Completing the Host District Evaluation

To improve the quality of the GSE program, it is important that the Foundation receive feedback from our district on the GSE team it hosted. Be sure to complete the Host District Evaluation (see page 45 of the Program Guide for Rotarians) and send it to our GSE coordinator at the Foundation.

Applying for subsidies/grants

Please note that to receive reimbursements our district must submit the appropriate completed request form, receipts, and other documentation of its participation. (See forms in section 4 for details.)

District Conference Subsidy. Districts may request a single subsidy per exchange of up to US\$500 to defray the cost of participation by the visiting team in the district conference. Team members must participate in a 30-minute GSE conference presentation and attend a substantial portion of the conference.

All required documentation must be received by the Foundation no later than two months after the expenses were incurred. Program subsidies remain the same regardless of team size. Except where otherwise noted, subsidies are covered through the World Fund budget if a GSE team travels on a World Fund Award, and through DDF if it travels on DDF allocated in *SHARE*.

The above adapted from RI's Program Guide for Rotarians available for download at www.rotary.org