

Top Tips

for a successful
youth exchange



 léargas



Erasmus+ Youth Series

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Introduction

Perhaps you're thinking of setting up a youth exchange for the first time, or already have a few already under your belt. Great! Léargas is here to support you at every step. We have collected our top tips for developing an international youth exchange. This list isn't exhaustive, but we hope it will help new organisations enter the world of youth exchanges for the first time, and experienced organisations to pick up suggestions for the future!

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DO...



BEFORE...

...Make sure you are eligible before you apply

There are a few simple elements to check to make sure you can take part in a Youth Exchange. For example: Do you have an established group of young people? What is the legal status of the group? What age are the young people? Check the full 'eligibility criteria' section in the [Erasmus+ Programme Guide](#) before you apply, and make sure you have everything in order.

Make sure you also know about funding rules. Even if you have applied for Erasmus+ funding before, you should come to an application clinic so that you can learn the most up-to-date information. Check our [calendar](#) for details of upcoming workshops.

...Make sure the project is youth-led, and addresses your young people's needs

It is essential for young people to be actively involved throughout all stages of the project: developing the idea; preparation and planning; design and delivery; and evaluation and reflection. All young people are different, and you know them best, so think about what they are interested in and empower them to get as involved as they can! Introduce the idea of a youth exchange to the group and then let them guide the project by choosing the theme of the project and what they need. Are they suggesting locations, getting involved in the planning and research, and coming up with one or two activities they would like to do? How do they want to reflect on their learning, and what are their learning goals for the project? You can use all this information in your application, and make sure your young people have their say in as many aspects as possible. Finally, you may know your group better than anyone - but make sure to explain in your application and reports how you selected them! A clear selection process is very important.

DO...

...Find a partner and choose them well

Is your organisation part of a national or international network that you can use to find a partner? If not, you can look for a partner through OTLAS, the online partner finding tool on the [SALTO Youth website](#). You can also get involved in contact-making seminars through Léargas to find partners. Contact us to find out more about these seminars. Once you've made a connection with an organisation, put in the time to build a relationship. Discuss what youth work means to you, how you work with young people, child protection, and what topics and ideas you want to explore. Are the partner's values similar to yours? Do their needs and objectives match up? Are they very different to your group, but still potentially interesting to work with?

...Set up a checklist

To keep everything on track, set up a checklist of items to be considered early on: setting up task groups; planning and scheduling; finance; research into the other country; games and activities; logistical matters; social activities; partner communication; meals and catering; travel; accommodation; risk and child protection; public relations (with local authorities, local media); project work; programme of activities and monitoring; evaluation and reporting. Once you have a checklist, you can assign roles, responsibilities and deadlines so nothing gets missed out!



DO...



...Organise an APV

APV means Advanced Planning Visit. An APV is a chance to meet your partner briefly in the country where the exchange will happen, to plan and prepare. Usually, the APV is part of your youth exchange project so you will have planned most of the project in detail by the time you go on one! We recommend it as a great opportunity to fine-tune your plans and develop your relationship with your partners. An APV is for a maximum of two days, so plan the agenda well. If this is going to be your first time meeting your partners face-to-face, it's a great opportunity to get to know them well, discuss any fears or concerns you may share, and start to build a strong relationship.

...Have a written, signed and agreed upon memorandum of understanding with your partners

A memorandum of understanding is an agreement between partners on how you'll all work together, and what each partner will bring to the table. This will help ensure everyone is fully aware of all that is involved. Identify two main contacts in each of your partner organisations, and then discuss and compare together how exactly you work with young people. Divide up roles, tasks and responsibilities, such as logistics, finance and applying for funding. Clearly map out from the beginning who is responsible for what and when tasks have to be completed. Have everyone sign this to confirm their agreement and acknowledge their individual responsibilities.

...Have a plan for when things go wrong

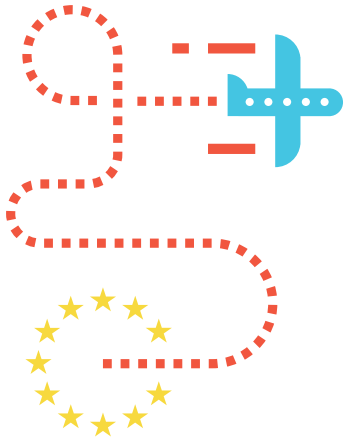
As we all know, the best laid plans can go astray! Be prepared to the best of your ability for things not going according to plan, and have a risk assessment and emergency procedure plan agreed upon in advance. Consider having a code of conduct for the young people, as well as an agreement between the project partners

DO...

and youth leaders. Always have 'Plan B' activities ready for unexpected changes, such as bad weather, external facilitators cancelling, and so on. If any issues do arise, contact Léargas for support and advice.

...Get to know each other!

Let participants get to know each other ahead of the exchange, to avoid shyness when the groups meet for the first time. You can do this by exchanging letters or photographs, or making videos to introduce the group. Consider partnering up your participants with the young people abroad in a 'buddy' system. You can also use Skype or Facebook. Don't forget about the leaders either! Let leaders get to know each other by discussing their previous involvement with these young people, how long they've been involved in youth work, and so on. Tell each other about the methods and techniques you use with young people and what you feel works best, so you each know what to expect.



...Keep in mind that the preparatory phase often decides the success or failure of a project!

Don't rush. There are three deadlines every year. If you miss one, there is always another one coming soon. There are also plenty of online guidance tools for you to use. Here are some practical tools to help with your youth exchange:

- Instructions on [how to apply](#)
- MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) on Erasmus+ funding opportunities for Youth [YouTube Channel](#)
- Our '[Starting out with Erasmus+](#)' resource booklet
- Blogs from leaders in previous youth exchanges: [James Bilson, YMCA Cork](#) and [Joe Curtin, Youth Work Ireland, Cork](#)

DO...



DURING...

...Exchange...

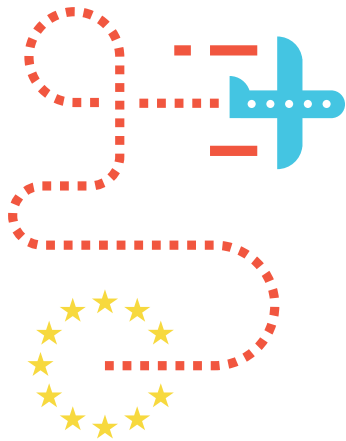
... Views, ideas, perspectives, attitudes: learn to work together and to appreciate the differences between you! Use workshops, exercises, debates, role-plays, simulations and outdoor activities. Organise a well-balanced programme of work, rest and play. Use programme activities that allow participants to challenge one another, learn together, resolve conflicts and challenge prejudices. Non-formal learning requires reflection: don't forget to plan this into the programme. Plan also to gather the evidence you need for evaluation.

...Evaluate the exchange both during and after the activity

Each partner organisation needs to evaluate the exchange both during and afterwards. Evaluation should take place with the young people, as national groups, as a whole group, and finally between the project leaders. Agree some set methods in advance for reflection and evaluation: more may occur naturally over the project lifecycle. Perhaps even get each participant to fill out a comment form. Allocate time to review the exchange both with participants and between leaders each day, and have a final evaluation meeting at the end of the exchange programme. Note that you will need to submit a 'final report' to Léargas detailing what happened on the exchange and what you feel you achieved, and you will need to reflect this evidence in it.



DO...



AFTER...

...Identify the impact of the exchange and share the results.

At the start of your project, when you have the initial idea, you will ask yourself why you want to do it. And at the end, you will ask “how do we know we achieved what we set out to achieve?”. This is the impact of your exchange. Impact is essentially the ‘fundamental changes’ that happen because of your project. It’s the difference your project makes to knowledge and skills, to behaviours and attitudes, to systems and methods for doing things, and more. Have the young people changed their attitudes or beliefs? Does the organisation do things differently now? Consider who can benefit from learning about these changes as they happen, and share the results throughout the project!

...Reflect on the learning

Youthpass is a great tool for young people’s self-reflection. It can result in a certificate for your young people, as well as being a great way of assessing what has been learned. Consider using Youthpass to help you and your young people to reflect on their experiences, knowledge gained, and the impact the project has had on their competencies and capabilities (<https://www.youthpass.eu/en/help/guide/>). There are many other ways to do this reflection, including blog posts, videos, exhibitions, social media, local press and newsletters. Don’t forget to share in person as well, by informing partner groups and other internal staff about the experience, and presenting about the experience at events. All of these methods are strong ways of sharing the results of your experience and encouraging others to get involved or actively participate. This is a very important factor for your funding--don’t forget about it!

DON'T...



...Don't underestimate the work involved!

We know that setting up a Youth Exchange can be time consuming, but the experience the young people gain is absolutely worth it, and we are here to support you through the project as best we can. It is important to consider as a group the amount of time, energy, enthusiasm and resources involved in taking on an exchange. The preparation phase is where most of the activity takes place, so it is important to give enough time to manage the workload. Build a team in your organisation, with staff, volunteers etc. who are able to support and commit to an exchange. If you are a small group or organisation, make your plans accordingly: a simple plan that works for you is all we want to see.



...Don't forget that you have a number of important relationships to manage with stakeholders!

This includes your exchange partner group, your own club/organisation, your local community, parents, the public, the funding agency, local businesses and media, etc. You may need to develop a parental consent form, inform local authorities, have arrangements with the funding body for on-site visits and reporting, links to local media to disseminate information about the exchange, etc. Try to widen your vision beyond yourself and your partner organisation and consider all aspects.

DON'T...

...Don't forget to be aware of language limitations, cultural differences and FOOD!

Culture shock can play a factor even on short distance exchanges, so it is good to prepare your young people in advance for the differences they might encounter. Similarly, as Youth Workers, you may find that the international staff you are dealing with have different views on child protection, youth work practice, etc, than you do. For language, you need to ensure young people can interact with each other to a certain degree, so this needs to be discussed with your partner. Finally, food choice can often make or break a youth exchange. Plan in advance for your young people's taste buds!

...And especially...

...Don't forget to consider how you will implement and evidence proper child safeguarding and protection

Please be aware that as a beneficiary of Erasmus+ funding, it is essential that you carefully consider the requirements of Child Protection and appropriate risk assessment in the implementation of your projects. This is particularly the case if you are working with young people under 18 and/or vulnerable adults. Please refer to [Tusla](#) documents for further guidance. We also have [guidelines for good practice regarding young people's safety on an exchange](#).

Please note you must also have policies and strategies in place for how you will deal with any potential risks. It is important to mention these in your reports to Léargas too!

Now, get planning, contact Léargas, set up an exchange - and enjoy every minute!

Get in touch

For support with your Erasmus+ Youth Exchange contact the Léargas Client Services Team:



clientservices@leargas.ie



01 887 1260



leargas.ie



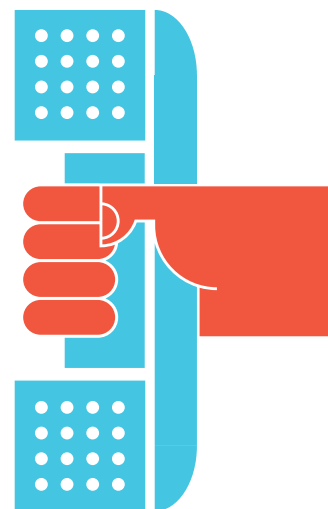
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