

Handbook for Short-Term E-Exchanges

Your Guide for Navigating an E-Exchange



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Introduction

Congratulations on your successful exchange application! We're delighted to have you as a participant in the Educator Exchange Programs (EEP).

You have already spent weeks applying and waiting to be accepted for this exchange, but the work isn't over—you now face several months of making personal and professional arrangements. The information in this handbook is intended to help you with these preparations, whether your exchange is within Canada or abroad.

The success of an exchange depends on the attitudes of the exchange partners. Keep an open mind—remember that you applied for the exchange because you wanted to experience a different education system and lifestyle. A positive attitude will get you far, as will your sense of humour. Careful planning can help you avoid unpleasant surprises. Don't hesitate to ask questions if you need to, and to contact EEP for help.

Both exchange partners need to take their obligations and responsibilities seriously. Above all, be honest with each other. Open communication is crucial. You may hesitate to share or ask about delicate issues, but not sharing this information can lead to problems. When someone doesn't feel comfortable enough to ask questions, a simple matter can grow into a larger problem.

We're confident that you will thrive in your exchange environment, and that you'll bring home memories and experiences that will stay with you for a lifetime. Whether you are a school leader or a teacher, embarking on a journey of ten days or a full year, we hope you have an exciting and rewarding exchange experience!



As a teacher, even though we're busy, the friendship, and just talking to somebody professionally and bouncing ideas off each other, was invaluable.

—exchange participant

Preparing for the E-Exchange

Communication

Contact between you and your exchange partner should be initiated as soon as your exchange is confirmed and should continue regularly until the exchange begins. Communications are to take place outside of classroom hours. Video applications are wonderful tools to get to know your partner. When communicating with your partner, be clear and diplomatic. Remember that you are trying to build a professional contract of trust and good will with someone you have never met, not addressing a friend. Once the business terms have been worked out and an understanding has been reached, you might consider developing a friendship from there.

In communicating with your partner, you should endeavour to

- show empathy, compassion and respect for them, their exchange partner and others;
- ensure all perspectives are heard;
- be an active listener and participant;
- have an open mind;
- collaborate and engage;
- lead and innovate;
- use leadership skills; and
- have fun and enjoy the experience.

Creating a Schedule

Successful e-exchanges require keen motivation and a sustained commitment. Applicants should be prepared to commit to the exchange for the entire duration, and be prepared to prioritize exchange meetings over other interests.

Frequency of Communication

We recommend a minimum of two communications a week. You may wish to schedule a longer weekend video meeting. This has proved to work well, in terms of navigating busy work week schedules and time changes.

Platform

The choice of platforms for communicating varies—from emails to phone calls to texts, Facetime, WhatsApp, Google chat, Zoom, Skype and following each other on social media. Past participants have found it useful to schedule video chats to get to know their exchange partners. You do not have to commit to one single platform, the idea is to find common channels of communication that are easy to maintain.



Learning about another system... I then took that straight into some of the professional learning I was leading for my staff.

— exchange participant

System Comparisons

You may wish to start documents together with your partner that show the differences and similarities around topic(s) that you are exploring.

Below is a sample Google Doc from a participant that you may wish to use as a template.

| Topics | New South Wales | Alberta |
|------------------------------|-----------------|---------|
| Curriculum | | |
| Types of programs | | |
| Philosophy of program/course | | |
| Promotion | | |
| Resources | | |
| Proficiency testing | | |
| Social media | | |
| School or division calendar | | |
| Supports for programs | | |

| New South Wales | Alberta | Comments |
|-----------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Syllabus | Program of Studies/ curriculum | These are the documents that list the outcomes that students are expected to achieve at each grade level. |
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| | | |

Questions to discuss at our next meeting:

| Alberta Partner | Australia Partner |
|-----------------|-------------------|
| | |

During the Exchange

EEP Meetings

EEP will hold mandatory orientation and debrief sessions. These involve the other Albertans also matched so that a cohort atmosphere is possible. The sessions are typically held via Zoom, afterschool, so they don't interfere with classroom hours.

Planning Guide

Each cohort will receive a Participant Planning Guide, which outlines the dates and activities, week by week. It can serve as a useful roadmap for your discussions. Below is a sample planning guide.

E-Exchange Participant Planning Guide: 2022 Australia-USA-Canada

Here are some examples and suggestions for timelines and activities that you may wish to undertake in your virtual e-exchange.

| Theme | Sample Topics | Sample Teacher Activities |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Mid-October | | |
| Getting to know each other | Communications begin! <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-introduction re: school, eg, role / position information, your professional career journey, your school environment (local context, team, priorities, projects) • Information-share re: hobbies, interests, local area environment | Take time to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • connect with your counterpart(s) via Zoom, email, phone, WhatsApp, etc • find out what "a day in my life" looks like for your counterpart(s): schedules, commute to school, activities; and • create a schedule in advance for your communications and consider a weekly video chat. |
| How will you communicate? Think about your communication styles, schedule and workload. What expectations do you have for this experience? What kind of time commitment are you expecting weekly? Will you work on a deliverable together? Each coordinator will communicate with you separately for an orientation, check-in and debrief. | | |
| 1 (October 24) | | |
| Schools and education systems | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differences and commonalities in education systems (main areas): structure, culture and missions, priorities, programs, methodologies, teacher training, operation of a school • Focus area identification | Find out about the differences in teaching / leading in your schools. Education system information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Send relevant weblinks of your education system. • Send relevant weblinks of your school including social media channels. • Send relevant curriculum/teaching websites. Discuss likely focus area and whether a final deliverable might be appealing. |

| | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2 (October 31) | | |
| Focus area refinement | Focus area collaboration and refining of specific topic | With reference to focus area: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine experiences of schools and systems. • Undertake and share topic research. • Advise e-exchange coordinator of topic selection. |
| 3 (November 7) | | |
| Focus area discussion | Continued focus area discussion | Consider possible outcomes and applications that can arise out of the focus area discussion and research. |
| <p>Mid-point Questions to consider</p> <p>What have you and your partner(s) decided to concentrate on as your focus? What has surprised you so far about your partner's/s' "day in my life"? What insights do you have about the differences in teaching/leading a school with your partner's area? What was the most interesting thing you learned about teaching practices in your host country? What new insights do you have about your own place in today's global community? What was your greatest professional success?</p> | | |
| 4 (November 14) | | |
| Focus area discussion | Continued focus area discussion | Consider how the e-exchange made you reflect on and refine your personal practice. Consider how—and with whom—the outcomes might be shared during and after the program. |
| 5 (November 21) | | |
| Final discussion | Plan any ongoing collaboration and contact. | Alberta participant to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • prepare 5–10-minute talk on focus area for debrief meeting. |
| 6 (November 28) | | |
| Final discussion | Finalize discussions and plan ongoing collaboration and contact. | E-exchange officially ends, but this does not have to mean the end of your communications! |
| <p>Debrief</p> <p>Questions to consider: outcomes and experience sharing, possibilities for the future</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Name one thing that truly surprised you about this experience. 2. Share one take away from this experience that you could now use in your role. <p>Also consider: How has the e-exchange made you reflect on your personal practice? When you look back on your experience, what did you learn about yourself? Name one change that you see in yourself as a teacher/school leader since this experience? What personal impact has this overseas experience had on you? What expectations did you have for this experience? How did reality meet/not meet those expectations? How do you feel about that? What will you do with what you've learned, felt and done? What key piece of advice would you have for a fellow teacher or school leader embarking on a similar experience?</p> | | |
| Notes | | |

Creating a Final Project

The EEP program does not currently require you to submit a final project. However, many partnering countries do require a project or write-up on their learnings. We do ask that you prepare a presentation to share with your cohort at the debrief meeting. Consider formalizing this presentation to share at a school or district level in the future.

Involving your Class

Yes, this is possible if you seek the appropriate permissions. We have had e-exchanges where the participants created projects with their students to learn more about the other partner's culture and language.



You get a bird's eye view of what's happening elsewhere

—exchange participant

After the Exchange

What next?

Just because the official exchange has ended does not mean that your exchange is over. Some plan to continue their collaborations and even visit each other.

Word of mouth is vital for the promotion of the program. Please take opportunities to share your experience and encourage others to apply.

Tips and Tricks from Past Participants

Below is feedback from our participants for you, to help you get the most out of your experience.

- Keep an open mind!!
- Be flexible with schedules and time differences.
- What has worked well for us is getting together at the same time each week. We initially had intended to meet twice a week, but it just proved too difficult, so we meet on Saturday (AB)/ Sunday (AUS). I really suggest using the guiding questions as your starting point and then being open to what comes up.
- Know what you want to focus on and be prepared to share and be vulnerable.
- Be open and try not to force anything—learning will happen!
- Be clear what you would like to learn about.
- Video calls make a positive difference in relationship building.
- Have fun! See where your initial conversations take you and focus on shared interests and learning goals.



To learn differences, it enriches my life

—exchange participant

language matching meetings other
 community games grateful
 approaches ways
 missing goodlot education
 learn opportunity event
 building country or
 learning schools
 hear grow invited interesting

