

Gateway Region YMCA The International Story

From the late 1960s through today, the Gateway Region YMCA has developed and maintained long-term international partnerships with the Colombian Federation of YMCAs, the Belize YMCA, Ukraine Federation of YMCAs, Porto Alegre Brazil YMCA, Temuco Chile YMCA, and U.S. Coalition of YMCAs supporting South Africa. Our involvement in these partnerships have taken the form of fundraising and travel to support cultural exchanges, teen trips, mission work, education advancement, and active involvement in efforts designed to support the global mission of the YMCA.

International understanding, fostering world peace, and developing relationships with others is what we do at the Gateway Region YMCA.

Goals

- Build relationships
- Foster international understanding and awareness
- Educate around cultural diversity and acceptance
- Encourage better comprehension of the world that we live in
- Cultivate and understand the meaning of healthy spirit, mind & body
- Lead and complete a mission-driven work project

The Metropolitan International Committee of the Gateway Region YMCA has authorized a teen trip for 2026 to our Y Partner: **YMCA Belize**

International Teen Trip Program Overview

Belize has been an International Partner YMCA since 1998. Over this yearly 30-year period, the two cities have grown in our cultural understanding and deepened our relationship. Our partnership consists of the Gateway Region YMCA supporting educational, sports, education, and youth development programs for youth in Belize. Specific areas include youth literacy, afterschool programming, swimming, sports, and summer youth exchanges. Preparing youth for high school “high school readiness” is one of the programs that YMCA Belize is very passionate about.

St. Louis teens will participate in **cultural exploration activities** coordinated and directed by YMCA staff and volunteers in Belize, including travel to historical sites, exploration of language and culture, team games with Belize youth, and shared meals. Following a week-long trip to Belize, the experience will conclude with the Belize teens traveling to St. Louis for a similar one-week trip. St. Louis teens will help introduce the Belize teens to U.S. culture, which may include a baseball game, visit to the Arch, visits to our St. Louis YMCAs, and other culture sharing activities.

The teen trip selection process involves recruiting, interviewing and identifying qualified teens who have demonstrated a commitment to the mission of the YMCA through volunteer engagement. The initial process begins in early fall; which **includes in-person interviews with applicants**. Following the selection of teens and adult chaperones, the travel team begins meeting on a regular basis between January to June to organize the team, raise funds, and learn about different cultures. All participants are required to attend these meetings, present to the team a topic they have researched, participate in group fundraising efforts, and upon return from their trip present to YMCA boards and other community organizations as requested.

GATEWAY REGION YMCA 2026 INTERNATIONAL TEEN TRIPS TIMELINE

Summer 2025	Application Process Zoom Info session - October 1, 5:30pm Application Deadline - October 31
November TBD	Teen Applicant interviews and selection
Q1 2026	Travel Team Meetings Start (including 2-3 parent meetings) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Learning the culture of Belize ▪ Fundraising ▪ Team-building Weekend at Trout Lodge
around June 14-20	International Trip (actual dates TBD)
around June 23-29	Host teens from Belize (actual dates TBD)
Summer 2026	Branch and Community Presentations by teens as requested

GENERAL INFORMATION

Recruitment - The recruitment process consists of candidates completing the application form which includes the following items: letter of recommendation from a principal, teacher, job supervisor, or community service leader, list of community service projects and completing the questionnaire below. A nomination form needs to be completed and signed by a YMCA staff member. Designated YMCA staff and volunteer members of the Metro International Committee will narrow candidates and select participants through an interview process.

Parent Meetings – Parents of the participants will meet three times prior to travel departure. The meetings will consist of general information, timeline, and other requirements. It is imperative that a parent(s) or guardian attend these meetings.

Teen Participant Meetings – Participants will meet a minimum of once or twice a month. During these meetings, they will learn the culture of the country they are visiting, plan and conduct fundraising events/projects and team building.

Culture – Participants will spend time learning the culture of the country.

Fundraising – Participants will decide on a few events that will help raise funds for their trip.

Team-building – Participants will get to know each other and complete team-building skills that will help with their trip experience. A weekend trip to YMCA Trout Lodge for team building will be scheduled. All teens **must** attend.

Presentations – Each participant will be required to present their international experience, post-travel, to their local YMCA branch or community group.

Teen Participant Responsibilities -

- Actively participate in all meetings and team building weekend
- Participate in group fundraising efforts. Participation in the Metro International Committee fundraiser is **required**.
- Choose a topic (i.e. food, land & climate, history, culture, etc) to research and present to the other travel participants
- Upon return present to YMCA or local community group your international experience
- Actively participate in all planned activities

Costs –

- Teen Participants will be required to pay a \$300 non-refundable participant fee. The fee will be used to help with total trip expenses.
- **Participants are responsible for their passports, visas, passport photos, shots/immunizations, and personal spending money.**

GUIDELINES FOR COMPLETING NOMINATION FORMS

1. The candidates must be between **16-19 years of age** at the time of travel and active in the YMCA (volunteer, staff, program participant, teen leader, etc.).
2. The candidate must be able to experience the trip both physically and emotionally.
3. The candidate must have medical insurance.
4. Participants do not need to have a passport at the time of application but are required to apply for one immediately upon selection. Passports are taking up to 11 weeks to obtain and are required to obtain their airline ticket.
5. Consider YMCA core values, leadership skills, work ethic, community service, and character development when making your nominations.
6. Your candidate will need to be able to pay a non-refundable \$300 participant fee that will go towards funding the cost of the trip. Remaining funds for the trip will be fundraised by the selected participants and the Metro International Committee. They will also need to pay for their own passports, visas, passport photos, and shots/immunizations.
7. Your candidate must be able to have the time to commit to the meetings, team building weekend & fundraising events. The meetings are critical for the overall success of the trip.
8. **If a participant is not able to attend the trip, they will be required to reimburse the YMCA for plane tickets purchased in their name, unless there is an emergency situation and approved by the District Vice President overseeing the trip.**
9. All areas of the application **must** be completed. Incomplete applications will be disqualified.

**SUBMIT COMPLETED APPLICATION PACKAGE NO LATER THAN
October 31st, 2025**

SUBMIT TO:

Gateway Region YMCA Attn: AJ Jefferson / E-mail: aj.jefferson@gwrymca.org
2815 Scott Ave, Suite D, St. Louis, MO 63103

GATEWAY REGION YMCA INTERNATIONAL TEEN TRIP APPLICATION

(TO BE COMPLETED BY CANDIDATE)

YMCA Branch:
Name:
Home Phone #: --

Address City, Zip:
E-mail:
Cell Phone #:
Date of Birth:
Age:
Sex:
School:

Please complete and check appropriate boxes:

- ☐ I have enclosed the questionnaire.
- ☐ I have enclosed the nomination form from my YMCA staff or Executive.
- ☐ I have enclosed a copy of a letter of recommendation and accompanying letter of good standing from my principal, teacher/professor, community leader outside the YMCA, job supervisor, etc.
- ☐ (Optional) Any additional information.

Please read, fill in your name, and sign the agreement below:

I, **NAME HERE**, and my parents, agree and commit to help raise funds necessary for the YMCA trip, to meet on a regular basis to prepare for the trip, pay the \$300.00 participant fee, form a strong team with my peers, and to participate in a post trip project related to what I learned and gained from my experiences.

Signature of Student

Signature of Parent (Guardian)

GATEWAY REGION YMCA INTERNATIONAL TEEN TRIP QUESTIONNAIRE

Briefly introduce yourself.

What excites you about this international experience? What do you hope to gain/accomplish from the experience?

Briefly describe your school-related activities.

Describe your main interests, hobbies, and activities outside of school.

If you were with a group of close friends in a comfortable setting, how would you respond to the statement, "The experience in my life which has had the most meaning for me has been...?"

The YMCA International Teen Trip Program maintains a strict policy against the use of alcohol, tobacco, or illegal drugs. If you found yourself in a situation where you were being offered any of the above-mentioned substances during the program, how would you respond?

List YMCA activities in which you demonstrated leadership.

Knowing group travel will require flexibility, change, and willingness to try new things, how do you feel prepared to handle this as part of a team?

List other activities (outside the YMCA) in which you demonstrated leadership, community service, or activities spent helping your community.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Activity</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Hours</u>
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GATEWAY REGION YMCA INTERNATIONAL TEEN TRIP NOMINATION FORM

(TO BE COMPLETED BY YMCA STAFF PERSON MAKING NOMINATION)

Name: _____ **Branch:** _____

Nominee's Name: _____

Please list the departments or programs in which the nominee works, participates, or volunteers

Please list skills and qualities that the nominee has that would be beneficial to the YMCA and its programming goals for the trip.

Please describe leadership skills, ability to work with others, working with little supervision and other information that might be helpful when selecting a nominee.

Date

YMCA Staff Signature

An acceptance letter will be sent to all the participants that have been selected.



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

GATEWAY REGION YMCA INTERNATIONAL TEEN TRIP STUDENT IN OF GOOD STANDING LETTER

Dear Educator/Administrator:

Your student, _____, has applied to travel as part of an exchange
(Teen's Name)
between the Gateway Region YMCA and the YMCA of Colombia. As part of the application process, we
need to verify that she/he/they are a student in good standing (compliant with your institution's
academic requirements and behavior standards). We appreciate you completing this verification below.

Sincerely,

Ken Strawbridge
Chair of the Gateway Region YMCA
International Committee

Dear Mr. Strawbridge:

Please be informed that _____ is a (freshman,
(Teen's Name)
sophomore, junior, or senior – circle one) at _____
(School Name)

and is considered a student in good standing. Please let this letter serve as confirmation that the
student is meeting academic requirements and has not been referred to detention, suspended, expelled
or required to participate in other interventions because of behavior or attendance.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Printed Name: _____



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

**GATEWAY REGION YMCA
INTERNATIONAL TEEN TRIP**

**LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION - YMCA staff member,
principal, teacher, leader outside of school, job supervisor,
etc.**