

FEC Exchange Program Policy

Written by Michael, Twin Oaks — Approved by Delegates in 2025

Purpose

This policy is intended to replace the old FEC “LEX” and “LETS” programs, which were somewhat confusing, under-developed, and based on a transactional system that falsely assumed parity between communities. The “FEC Exchange Program” seeks to address these weaknesses through proposing a new framework, mentality, and mechanism for meaningful travel between FEC communities by FEC community members.

Overview

The FEC Exchange Program funds travel between FEC communities for FEC community members to share skills, offer mutual aid, build relationships, and experience other egalitarian communities. These “Exchange Trips” are non-transactional and focused on culture-building, learning, and connection. There is no formal labor debt or tracking within the FEC Exchange Program.

The FEC Exchange Program is only for FEC Member Communities by default. However, if there is consensus among delegates, it may be possible to fund Exchange Trips involving FEC Communities in Dialogue or Friends of the FEC. The FEC Exchange Program should not be used for travel to or from communities that are not associated with the FEC.

Coordinators and Hosts

For any Exchange Trip to take place, there must be one “coordinator” from the home community, and at least one “host” from the host community.

“Coordinators” should fulfill the following minimum expectations:

- Establish connection with the host(s) well in advance of the trip.
- Provide contact information to the host(s) for all the Exchangers on the trip.
- Provide up-to-date information to the hosts about travel and arrival details.
- Ensure, within reason, that all Exchangers understand basic information and expectations around the trip.
- Ensure, within reason, that all Exchangers attend necessary orientations and scheduled work shifts.

- Be a general liaison for Exchangers and hosts.
- Be on-call for hosts throughout the trip.
- Help to address any problems that arise (ideally before hosts have to get involved).
- Report back to home and host communities about how the trip went.

(All of this work counts towards the coordinator's labor expectation during the Exchange.)

“Hosts” should fulfill the following minimum expectations:

- Establish connection with the coordinator well in advance of the trip.
- Figure out appropriate room accommodations for Exchangers.
- Orient Exchangers on community norms*.
- Assist with finding suitable labor for Exchangers.
- Answer Exchangers' questions.
- Be on-call for Exchangers throughout the trip.
- Help to address any problems that arise related to the Exchangers.
- Report back to home and host communities about how the trip went.

*Host communities should have a collection of basic information for hosts to use in orienting Exchangers about the host community's cultural and behavioral expectations.

(Hosts should receive labor compensation/credit in their home communities for doing this work)

Approval process for Exchange Trips

Step 1: Delegates of the relevant home community and the relevant host community approve the initial idea of a given trip.

Step 2: After the two involved communities have consented, one of the delegates of the involved communities must submit a written proposal (which can be as simple as an email) to all current FEC delegates with the following information:

- Where is the Exchange Trip coming from (home community) and where is it going to (host community)?
- How many people are going, and how many of those people are members?
- What is the intended itinerary for the trip (dates of arrival, length of trip, any additional plans, etc.)?
- What is the reason for the trip (skillshare, mutual aid, etc.)?
- What are the proposed travel methods and estimated costs?

- Who will serve as the “host(s)” and “coordinator(s)” for the trip?

Step 3: After the delegates have received a written proposal for the Exchange Trip, the trip can be approved by the FEC delegates using funding from the FEC Exchange Fund. In making decisions about which trips to provide funding for, priority is given to trips that:

- Involve skill-sharing — a communard offers or receives specific, relevant training or experience (e.g., construction, food preservation, facilitation).
- Provide mutual aid — the host community has a time-sensitive need for extra support, and the Exchanger(s) can meet that need.
- Strengthen inter-community connections — especially where inter-community bonds may be harder to maintain due to geographic distance or other reasons.

Other valuable reasons to approve trips include:

- Cultural cross-pollination — exchanging and comparing different ways of doing things.
- Communard renewal — providing individuals with meaningful time away from their home communities.
- Exploration — helping communards explore other models of egalitarian community living.

Additional Guidelines

Communities should generally prioritize sending *members* on Exchange Trips—as opposed to visitors and guests—and should make an effort to rotate availability for Exchange Trips so that they’re accessible to a wide portion of the community’s population.

The home community is responsible for determining members’ eligibility to participate in an Exchange Trip. The home community’s FEC Delegates should prohibit participation for individuals who the Delegates believe may cause problems at the host community.

Whenever significant travel and costs are involved, it’s recommended that an Exchange Trip last somewhere between 1–3 weeks. But, it is ultimately up to the delegates to decide which trips to approve or not. It’s encouraged, but not necessary, to try to line Exchange Trips up with existing significant community events—land days, conferences, FEC Assemblies, etc.—as well as existing travel plans, where money and resource savings may be possible.

Geographically nearby communities may come up with Exchange Trip plans that involve many shorter visits over a longer period of time. As long as these arrangements follow

the standard approval process for Exchange Trips, they are considered valid Exchange Trips and should be treated accordingly.

Priority may shift based on budget, current travel activity, or community needs. Delegates should seek balanced distribution across communities and time, taking into account the different population sizes of different communities.

Expectations for Exchangers

Travelers on Exchange Trips are expected to contribute at least 2 hours of labor per day on average. This expectation is intended to facilitate better engagement between the Exchangers and the host community, and to encourage a reasonable labor contribution without overburdening the Exchanger with work expectations. This also seeks to avoid the logistical complications of trying to match up different labor systems of the home and host communities. While not strictly enforced, consistent failure to meet this labor expectation may result in Exchangers not being approved for future Exchange Trips.

Exchangers are expected to uphold host community norms, treat all members with respect, and seek clarity if unsure about expectations. Failure to do so may result in early departure or exclusion from future Exchanges.

All Exchangers get full daily labor compensation/credit in their home community for the entire duration of the Exchange—including travel time and time spent at the host community. After arriving for the Exchange, if an Exchanger spends a day or more outside of the host community, they do not receive compensation/credit in their home community for that time. If it is determined that an Exchanger did not meet the basic behavioral and work expectations at their host community during an Exchange Trip, they may be denied compensation/credit in their home community for the time spent on the Exchange.

Dealing with problems

Problems with Exchange Trips—coordinators or hosts failing to meet their expectations, expenses not being handled appropriately, trips being poorly organized, major cancellations or other significant last-minute changes, etc.—may lead to certain individuals or communities being treated with more caution around approval for future Exchange Trips. All FEC delegates are expected to support all other delegates in avoiding these kinds of problems.

If there are significant problems with a certain Exchange Trip, the relevant hosts, coordinators, and/or delegates are expected to write a statement explaining these problems and proposing how such issues could be avoided in future trips. These statements should be kept in a public location with the FEC documents, to be

referenced in order to understand past events and ensure smoother Exchange Trips in the future.

FEC Exchange Fund

FEC Exchange Trips are paid for using the FEC Exchange Fund, which is budgeted for during the normal FEC budgeting process. Each year, a recommended minimum of \$1,500 per Member Community (in 2025 USD; delegates should automatically adjust that number according to inflation) is budgeted for the FEC Exchange fund. (If the number of FEC Member Communities and the amount they're contributing in dues each year makes this recommended minimum unreasonable, it should be adjusted accordingly.) That amount is intended to be roughly sufficient to cover at least one and a half full Exchange Trips from one Member Community to any other Member Community in the FEC. This number is just a recommended budget minimum; delegates are encouraged to budget more or less money for Exchange Trips during the annual budgeting process as they see fit. Money budgeted for the FEC Exchange Fund does not accumulate if unspent in a given budget year.

The FEC delegates track the Exchange Fund, which generally approves reimbursements after the completion of an Exchange Trip. The only expenses covered by the Exchange Fund are ones directly related to travel: gas, airfare, train tickets, etc. Exchangers are expected to bring or buy their own food for travel days, and host communities are expected to provide free food and other basic accommodations during the Exchange. Receipts are required for reimbursement, with basic explanations included (gas, bus, airfare, etc.). If there is a travel emergency during an Exchange Trip—such as a vehicle breaking down or someone suddenly having to fly home—the home community is expected to pay for any unexpected costs.