

RURAL YOUTH EUROPE

Board Member Handbook 2018



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1. *Welcome*

If you have just been elected, or are considering standing for election to the board of Rural Youth Europe, welcome. This document is a collection of useful information that can help you understand the role and responsibilities of a board member. It is compiled from information gathered from several official documents, and is updated from time to time.

2. *What's in it for me?*

The role of a board member is a challenging yet rewarding position. It brings with it the opportunity for significant personal development and the chance to make a real difference to the lives of young people in the European countryside. The board activities provide a unique working environment where team members can and must put their valuable skills and experience into practise.

Board members are able to learn about international leadership, European NGO's, cultural differences and cultural heritage, and a wide range of rural issues. This experience has been shown to have significant benefit for people's future careers and success in life.

3. *Overview of Rural Youth Europe*

Rural Youth Europe (further referred to as 'RYEurope') is a European Non-Governmental Organisation for rural youth. Established in 1957, it functions as an umbrella for youth organisations working to promote and activate young people in the countryside. It provides international training possibilities and works as an intermediary between national organisations, youth organisations and public institutions on a European level. RYEurope is a member-led organisation: democratically constituted and led by young people for young people.

The charter of RYEurope states four main aims:

- To further and promote the activities of rural youth
- To educate and train young people and to create an awareness of the issues of the countryside
- To promote intercultural understanding through international meetings
- To focus the attention of international and national agencies and organisations, both governmental and private, as well as the general public on the challenges and needs of rural youth

3.1. *Members*

RYEurope has 21 member organisations across 16 countries (the UK is counted as four countries) which represent around 330,000 young people. Through its extended network the organisation can reach 500,000 young people in rural areas in Europe. These youngsters are members of local rural youth organisations, such as Young Farmers' Clubs or 4H organisations. The participants consist mainly of young people who live in rural areas or have an interest in rural life. The member organisations are divided into 4 regional groups:

- Group 1: UK and Ireland (including England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Ireland)
- Group 2: Central Europe (including Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Slovenia, Hungary)
- Group 3: Nordic countries (including Norway, Finland, Sweden, Denmark)
- Group 4: Eastern Europe (including Latvia, Estonia, Poland, Armenia)

3.2. Events

RYEurope uses events to create a platform for learning, developing and improving life for young people in rural areas. Each event has a preparation team (prep team) which is responsible for organising the event (practical arrangements, sessions, etc.). The prep team consists of local volunteers and sometimes staff members, a RYEurope board representative and international team members. RYEurope announces the calls (information sheet and enrolment procedure) for the events and additional team members (as may be required). Board and staff members are responsible for making sure the quality of the event is high and the learning outcomes stated in the funding application are achieved.

Study Session

The Study Session is an educational event held in one of the youth centres of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg or Budapest, and covers themes like democracy, human rights and current European issues. It usually takes place for a week in the period February to May and is often organised together with a partner (another European youth organisation).

European Rally

The European Rally is a multilateral youth exchange which is hosted by one of the member organisations. Teams of five young people from each member organisation come together for an intensive week long programme of leadership, teamwork, educational and intercultural experience. The General Assembly (further referred to as 'GA') usually takes place at the rally.

Autumn Seminar

The Autumn Seminar is organised in cooperation with a member organisation of Rural Youth Europe and is held in a different country every year. It is an educational event about a rural theme and includes usually theoretical input, sharing of good practise, workshops and farm excursions.

Junior Event

The Junior Event is organised for those who are under 18 years of age. The aim is to provide an international event where non-formal learning is used. The Junior event was organised for the first time in 2015 as requested by Nordic member organisations (who have a high proportion of members who are under 18 and unable to participate in other RYEurope events) but doesn't necessarily take place every year.

Conference

During 2017 a new event was created to bring together many of the staff members and senior officials from member organisations to share best practise, discuss topical issues and create a support network between themselves. It is hoped that it can become a bi-annual event for the organisation.

Additional Events

Additional events with specific themes of interest for rural youth like sustainable regional development or networking between rural youth organisations are sometimes organised. Participants can be sent

as well to various training courses and seminars organised by the Council of Europe, the European Youth Forum and other international NGOs.

4. Board: structure, roles and responsibilities

4.1. Board's structure

The Board consists of a maximum of seven persons as follows: Chairman, Vice-chairman, four regional board members (representing each of the four regions) and one board member representing a specific special interest. The GA decides on the necessity of filling this latter position, and about the nature of the special interests.

Each board member is elected for a term of two years. Board members must be nominated by full member organisations and elected by the GA. That means that if after one year a board member becomes Vice-chair or Chair, or resigns from the board, the place is usually filled by the nominating organisation.

It is up to each region to decide how they nominate their regional representative to the board.

The full structure of the board is stated in the RYEurope charter.

4.2. Role of the board

Preserving and, when necessary, reshaping the mission –

This is the most important role of the board. It is the board's responsibility to lead the organisation towards its goals, which are set in the Development or Strategic plans.

Employment –

The board appoints and oversees the Secretary General. The Secretary General, with the assistance of the board when needed, appoints and oversees other employees.

Ensuring that the organisation is well-managed –

Whilst the board should not manage the organisation, it should be satisfied that the organisation is managed efficiently. To achieve this, the board should ask enough questions to satisfy itself that staff members are assigned to key tasks and resources are allocated through a realistic budget.

Representing the external world to the organisation and the organisation to the external world –

The board members are a *bridge* and communication line between the RYEurope and the external world. They are sometimes also a *buffer* for requests and information. Board members advocate on behalf of the organisation, helping to raise awareness of its mission.

Exercising financial stewardship –

The board is responsible for the finances of the organisation, and together with staff develop the budget.

Making sure that the organisation complies with laws and regulations –

The board must be aware of laws and regulations that apply to the organisation, and act in good faith at all times.

Protecting the organisation from external threats –

With its strategic role, the board should identify any threats on the horizon (such as changes in funding, or political climate), and act accordingly.

Board members must also be prepared to step forward to explain and defend the organisation's good name, or position on a certain topic. RYEurope has a good reputation in the EU youth network - one of the main reasons, why the organisation is able to receive EU funding.

Ensuring that the board has the right skills and experience to do its job –

The board requires individuals with a strong commitment to the fundamental purpose and mission of the organisation. The board also should include individuals with the specific skills and knowledge needed to examine issues through multiple aspects: legal, financial, public relations, communications, etc.

4.3. Duties as an individual board member

Attend all meetings – the skills and knowledge a board member possesses is not relevant if the person is not present at the meeting to participate in discussions and decisions.

Be prepared and informed – before each meeting the materials that are circulated and placed in the meeting folder (see chapter below for Dropbox, documents and calendar) should be read carefully. Board members should come prepared to ask questions and make comments. Being well prepared saves time at the meeting and enables the board to achieve more.

Speak your mind and ask hard questions – It is important for board members to ensure the organisation is on the right path, and remains relevant to its member organisations. The regional board members in particular must ensure they stand up for the views and values of the organisations they represent.

Take responsibility for management of the organisation's resources – the board must make certain that raised funds are used legitimately for the right purposes.

Support others in the team – check and support others to make sure they are doing their best, understand their role and have everything they need. Only when the full board acts in cohesion can the organisation's mission be fully accomplished.

Honesty is paramount – one of the most important assets of RYEurope is its good name, which in turn reflects on the confidence of funders in RYEurope's capacity to manage and spend funds appropriately. Board members must be honest with themselves and realistic about what can be achieved as individuals, as a team and as an organisation. If the board sets a good example, the staff and organisation will most likely follow.

4.4. The allocation of responsibilities

Both the board of RYEurope and its staff must have a clear understanding of each other's roles.

- **GA** is the highest decision making body. Usually it is organised at the rally and all member organisations are requested to send delegates. The GA selects the board and approves important documents, such as Development plan, Annual Reports and others.
- **The board** is responsible for other actions and decisions, such as designing and approving new programmes, appointing and supervising the secretariat.
- **The secretariat** is responsible for running daily business with help and advice from the board. It also implements the development of the organisation whilst working to the agreed budget. Where possible it establishes operating procedures to aid work efficiency and clarification in future.

4.5. Task division

Each board member has responsibilities according to their particular role.

- **Chairman** is the one leading the organisation, board and its meetings. In charge of staff together with vice-chairman.
- **Vice-Chairman** is responsible for learning the role of Chairman and fills the role when the Chairman is absent.
- **Regional Board members** are the link between member organisations and the board.
- **Extra board member** is elected to serve for a special purpose, which is defined by the GA.

Apart from these fundamental things there is a list of tasks that are assigned to board members by a free choice. They can be, but not limited to:

- Being a contact person for a partner organisation
- Taking responsibility for an event
- Supervising media channels – Rural Voices (Magazine), Monthly E-News, website, Social media, etc.
- Supervising finances

5. Dropbox, Documents and calendar

5.1. Dropbox

Once elected as a board member, it is important to get up to speed as soon as possible. All documents that relate to how the organisation functions are stored in Dropbox document sharing service, and access to relevant folders is granted upon election. The Dropbox folders include:

- Office
- Board

- Key Documents
- Media
- Event folders

5.2. Documents

Here is a list of some of the most important documents:

- Charter: official document about Rural Youth Europe, its members and rules.
- Annual reports
- Behavioural guidance (sent to participants before events)
- Development plan/Strategic plan
- Hosting guidelines (Info package for hosting organisations)
- Minutes of board meetings
- Minutes of GA
- Membership guidelines (membership categories and fees)
- Reports from events
- Communication strategy (How Rural Youth Europe uses different communication channels and how responsibilities are shared)
- Regular financial and operating reports

Although it is not necessary to know all of these by heart, board members should be aware of their contents and know when to consult them. To aid with this an additional overarching document exists called *'Overview of Rural Youth Europe Documents'*.

When creating new documents, it is important that they are saved in the right folder and if approved by either the GA or board, should also be published in pdf format. It is recommended to add information about who has created the document and when it was updated for future reference.

5.3. Calendar

The calendar of the upcoming year's board meetings, events and other important dates is made in Google Calendar, to which board members must be added to once elected. Board members can also add their own RYEurope appointments (denoted with their initial) to the calendar to inform the rest of the board of their activities.

6. Meetings

The board normally has around four physical meetings per year in the countries of its member organisations.

6.1 Meeting Format

The meetings usually are held during weekends – Saturday and Sunday – with two extra travel days: Friday and Monday.

The first board meeting during the Autumn is a hand-over meeting with both new and old board members present to pass over all relevant information to the new board team. New board members should use this meeting to identify the following:

- Who are the contact persons in organisations of my regional group?
- What kind of organisations do I have in my regional group?
- Who are the contact persons in the partner organisations I will be responsible for?
- Anything else that I need to know?

The minutes of each meeting are an important record of the discussions and decisions made at each meeting. The secretary general leads on completing these, and approval sought from the board as soon as possible after the meeting to sign these off. They are formally signed by the chairman at the next physical meeting.

6.2 Meeting Costs

For board meetings all expenses (travel, accommodation and food) are fully covered. Usually the Secretary General pays any bills for food and drinks (apart from any alcoholic ones). At lunch and dinner (if at restaurant/cafe) board members can take either starter and main dish or main dish and dessert.

Boarding passes, receipts and all other proofs of the costs incurred must be given/sent to the secretariat with a completed reimbursement form so they can be processed and paid as soon as possible.

6.3 How decisions are made in the board

At the board meetings decisions are made with the help of modified parliamentary procedure: Each decision must be proposed by any of the board members, and seconded by another one. The proposer and seconder are recorded in the minutes.

7. Funding

Here are listed the most important funding sources. Other funding like sponsorship can be used as well.

7.1. Membership fees

All member organisations pay membership fees according to their membership category and membership base (bigger ones pay more than smaller ones). Fees vary from 300 euro to 4000 euro. More about membership issues, such as fees and categories can be found in *Membership Guidelines*.

7.2. Council of Europe/European Youth Foundation

Council of Europe (CoE) funds RYEurope through the European Youth Foundation (EYF). Funding is given for the annual work plan, which usually includes three events and board meetings and usually linked to a theme for the year, such as peace building, democracy or human rights.

7.3. Erasmus+

For each event the hosting organisation applies for Erasmus+ funding from the European Union. The office can help with writing the application and report if needed (the role division is agreed with the hosting organisation). The amount of grant differs from country to country, but includes costs for the event and travel expenses.

Erasmus+ also funds RYEurope with an operational grant. This is meant for salaries and daily costs.

7.4. Participant fees

Participant fees are collected from participants of the event. Participant fees are usually 250-300 euro for participants from higher GDP countries and 150-200 euro for participants from lower GDP countries. Usually the fees are paid by the sending organisations, not the young people themselves, but it differs from organisation to organisation. Participant fees are often used to pay travel reimbursements. An extra 50-euro fee is charged for participants who are not members of one of RYEurope's member organisations. Priority to send participants is of course given to member organisations. More information can be found in the *Hosting Guidelines*.

8. Office

8.1 Location

The office is rented from the Finnish 4H federation and is located in the same building as the Finnish 4H federation. The office consists of the office room and a storage place. The address is:

Karjalankatu 2A
00520 Helsinki
Finland

The charter of RYEurope requires that the secretariat is based at the offices of one of the member organisations.

8.2. Bookkeeping and financial auditing

Bookkeeping services are provided at present by a company local to the office.

Internal Auditor (from a member organisation) is elected every second year at the GA. Every year there is also an external audit which is conducted by an auditing company.

9. Employment issues

Rural Youth Europe employs one full-time Secretary General and other part-time employees, currently an Education and fundraising manager, and a Graphic Designer. The employees are allowed to work outside of the office. The SG is responsible for coordination and supervision of other employees.

Regular working hours for the Secretary General are 7,5 h per day. Overtime is usually given back on an hour by hour basis (time off in lieu). Other employees are usually paid on an hourly basis. Exact arrangements are detailed in the contracts for each employee.

Working hours are recorded in a time sheet. The Chairman approves the timesheet of the SG by signature and the SG approves the timesheets of other employees.

Travel and other costs are reimbursed and accepted by the signature of the Chairman.

Daily allowances and kilometre reimbursement are paid according to the regulations from the Finnish tax office (www.vero.fi). The amount of allowance is given for each country every year. Two free warm meals per day will reduce the allowance to half.

10. Media

Rural Youth Europe uses following media channels

- Rural Voices magazine
- website www.ruralityoutheurope.com
- Blog (published on website)
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- newsletter (Mailchimp)
- emails

Each board member gets a ruralityoutheurope.com email address. The member organisations can be reached via members@ruralityoutheurope.com email list and the board via board@ruralityoutheurope.com. Each board member should make sure the contact details of their member organisations are up-to-date.

Board members are given access to relevant social media sites and are requested to make posts whenever there is something relevant available with the view to keeping all media channels lively and active. For more information about media, see *Communication Strategy*.

11. Partners

RYEurope has several partners with whom events are organised together. Here are listed some partner organisations:

- European Youth Forum (YFJ)
- Youth Express Network (Y-E-N)
- MIJARC (International Movement of Catholic Agricultural and Rural Youth)
- IFYE (International Farm Youth Exchange)
- NSU (Nordic Youth Organisation)
- CEJA (Council for European Young Farmers)

12. European Youth Forum

European Youth Forum is a platform for youth organisations in Europe. During 2015-2016 the board has discussed that more advantage should be taken of the membership at the organisation, which resulted in the appointment of an additional board member to fulfil this aim on a trial basis.