

Report on Host Compensation in Canada

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Executive Summary

A survey of 30 homestay programs across Canada has shown that fees paid to hosts vary widely from region to region and are highly influenced by competition in local markets.

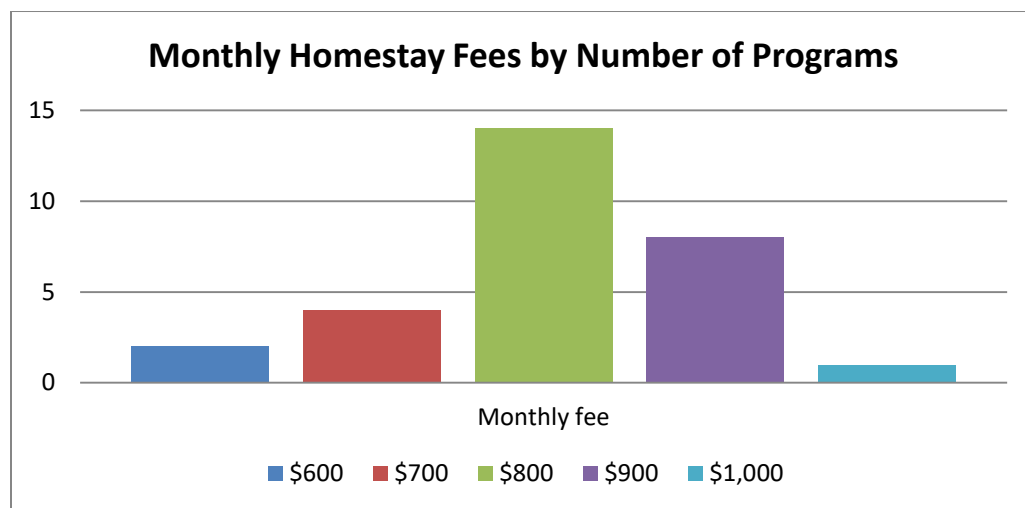
While host payments are supposed to compensate families for expenses, it's clear that supply and demand is a key factor in determining how much a program will pay.

Fees range from a low of \$575 per month in rural areas of the Atlantic provinces to \$950 in one school district near Vancouver. That's a difference of 60 percent.

In Canada's two most popular destinations for international students - Toronto and Vancouver - competition among educational programs is fierce. As might be expected, host fees are highest in those cities.

According to the survey, across Canada the average compensation for hosts is \$750. The most common monthly compensation is \$800, with almost half of the programs surveyed paying this amount.

What does the future hold? A number of programs stated that they are reviewing host compensation with an eye to increasing fees to attract more hosts.



Compensation Varies Across Canada

The survey demonstrated that fees are widely available across the country. If the fee is intended to reimburse families for the cost of food and household expenses related to having a student, one would expect that it would be roughly the same everywhere.

Fees are lowest in the Atlantic provinces and smaller cities in Canada. In rural areas in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, the compensation ranges from \$575 to \$600. This may reflect the fact that there is often only one educational institution, the local school board, in many of these towns. Without any competition to push up fees, the school board can keep fees low.

Toronto and Vancouver are the two most popular destinations for international students. Both cities have a wide range of institutions with homestay programs, including school districts, colleges, universities, private language schools, private high schools and other programs. In the summer, some programs must recruit hundreds of additional host families to meet the seasonal demand. The large number of educational institutions means that competition for hosts is fierce.

Therefore, it's not surprising that programs in Vancouver and Toronto provide the highest compensation, ranging from \$800 and up. One program in the survey reported paying hosts \$950 per month in the Vancouver area.

"I often get an enquiry, only to be told we don't pay enough and they withdraw their application," says Kathy Hibbs of Trinity Western University, located in Langley, near Vancouver.

Hosting for the right reasons

Hosting is not supposed to be about money. It is meant to provide families with exposure to different cultures and allow them to share Canadian experiences with their students.

Hosts should not expect to get rich from homestay fees, but they do want to ensure that their expenses are covered.

"Low compensation weeds out families that are hosting purely for the money," says one homestay coordinator in British Columbia.

However, programs that operate in cities where there are huge number of students, especially at peak times, often have to accept families that see compensation as a primary reason for hosting. There are simply too many students and not enough potential host families.

Host Retention

When asked to consider the statement that “low compensation makes it hard to retain hosts,” 90 percent of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed somewhat.

Rae-Lynn Rempel of Manitoba Institute of Trades and Technology says hosts often comparison shop. “They will move on to an agency/school that compensates the most or will stop hosting all together. With rising costs it is understandable.”

As well, hosts may be reluctant to take on students for only a few weeks, preferring to hold out for a placement for the entire semester. “For shorter term groups, hosts want either multiple students or a higher daily rate,” says Danielle Johnsrude of Vancouver Island University.

Special Fees

A number of programs impose special fees on students, in addition to the monthly homestay charge and placement fee. These can include:

- Non-refundable charges for cleaning the student’s bedroom at the end of the homestay
- Meal per diems for athletes who consume above-average levels of calories
- An extra fee of \$60 per month for lunch, with breakfast and dinner included in the monthly charge
- A damage deposit of \$300 to \$500

In addition, some programs are considering fees for special services. “Hosts are saying the stipend is a little low,” says Rempel of MITT. “This is especially in the case of hosting boys or men at the post-secondary level. Special food requirements such as vegan, vegetarian or Halal are also taxing on the host. We are considering this as a separate addition to the homestay fees that are currently under review.”

In addition, some wealthy overseas families are paying extra for deluxe service. Commented one homestay coordinator in Vancouver: “I have heard some kids staying in private homes are paying as much as \$2,000 per month but that is cooking hot meals morning, noon and dinner, as well as driving to and from school and to activities.”

What does the future hold?

A number of programs indicated that they are reviewing host compensation, with a view to increasing fees in order to attract more prospective hosts.

“Competitive markets require higher compensation,” noted one program in Victoria, BC.

As the number of international students in Canada continues to grow, we can expect that the demand for hosts may be greater than the supply.

If you have any comments or questions about the survey, please email Doug Ronson at douglasronson@yahoo.ca.

A note on the survey

This report is based on 30 responses from homestay programs across Canada. In the ESQ Educational Services June 2018 newsletter, an open invitation was sent to homestay subscribers across Canada. Therefore, the results do not represent all homestay programs in Canada, but do reflect a good sample.