

Frequently Asked Questions

@SECRETPUPEXCHANGE

These are some of the most frequently asked questions from new participants. Don't see your question? Send @SecretPupExchange a DM and we will get back to you ASAP.

HOW DO I SIGN UP?

Only personal, dog-based Instagram accounts are allowed to participate (no shop accounts). Sign ups are accepted only during the sign up window. Be sure to follow us on Instagram for those dates. Our SCHEDULE highlight is always up-to-date, and we post stories as the sign up window gets close. Instructions on how to sign up are provided in the LinkTree in our bio throughout the sign up window. Late sign ups cannot be guaranteed.

WHY DO I HAVE TO PAY A SIGN UP FEE?

We are an inclusive group and allow people to join even if we don't know them personally. As the exchange grew, the sign up fee was introduced to keep SPE participants accountable. Since we introduced the sign up fee, we have had a higher success rate of shipped boxes. Also, the costs of running the exchange increased each year. SPE keeps \$1 from each sign up fee to help pay for those costs. At the end of each exchange, any unused funds are donated to an animal charity that was nominated by the participants when they sign up.

WHY DO YOU NEED MY NAME & PHONE NUMBER?

Although it doesn't happen often, there are times when we cannot get in touch with you via Instagram. If you are not responding to IG messages, one of the hosts will call or text you. Human names are required because we have had more than one package returned to the sender because there was only a dog's name.

I HAVE A PRIVATE INSTAGRAM ACCOUNT, CAN I STILL JOIN?

Yes. Private dog Instagram accounts are approved by the hosts on a case by case basis. These accounts must accept follow requests from all other accounts in their Group Chat for the duration of the exchange.

I'M NEW BUT I WANT TO DO BUDGET 3... CAN I?

We would love nothing more than for you to be in Budget 3, but we need to make sure that the exchange is a good fit first. All new participants need to start with Budget 1 or 2 before they can join the larger budgets. We appreciate your understanding in this.

WHAT'S INCLUDED IN THE BUDGET?

The budget should be spent on items for the dog(s) you are matched with. Use their questionnaire answers, their Instagram page & the Group Chat as a guide to help you shop. Also, the budget is per household, not per dog. So, if you are matched with a multiple dog household, the budget covers all the dogs named in their questionnaire answers. **Example:** if you are in Budget 1 - Toys & Treats, and matched with a 2 dog household, your \$25-\$35USD (\$35-\$50CAD) budget is spent on two dogs, not per dog.

If you do choose to include items for the human (many people do), that's great, but please remember that it is **optional** and should not be counted towards the budget. This is for the pups, after all.

The budget also does not include any shipping costs. Please do your research on shipping so you are not surprised by costs, especially as they have gotten more expensive recently. See the shipping information in our LinkTree for helpful tips and tricks.

I'M NOT VERY CRAFTY...DO I HAVE TO DECORATE THE BOX I SEND?

For Budgets 1 & 2, decorating is NOT required. But truthfully, about 95% of B1 & B2 participants do decorate their boxes. If you do, that's great! If you don't, that's okay too.

NEW IN 2025..Budgets 3 & 4 have \$5 included in the total budget for decorating the box, and decorating is **required** for those Budgets.

HOW DO I KNOW WHAT TO BUY?

The first stop is your match's Instagram page (posts, reels, stories and highlights). It's a great place to see what they are into and to put pup faces to names! In addition to your Secret Pup's instagram, you will be in a chat group with them. Ask questions, create polls, and enjoy the conversation. Last, you will have access to their questionnaire answers via your match email. You should use these answers as a guide to help you shop, as well as to get to know them.

HOW DO I KNOW WHAT NOT TO SEND?

Your match's questionnaire is the best place to start for items that shouldn't be included. We ask that you do not send items that your pup is allergic to or that they cannot have. You should not include rawhide of any kind (prohibited by SPE). Re-gifting items or sending used items (even items that were just worn for a photo) is also not allowed and will exclude you from future exchanges.

Please do not shop with extreme discount retailers like Temu/Shien/AliExpress or dollar stores. Items from TJ Maxx/HomeGoods/Winners are acceptable, but please double check expiration dates on any treats that you purchase. They should have a "best by" date that is at least one month from the last day of the SPE shipping window. Please ask if you have specific questions about this.

If you send a prohibited item, you will be asked to send a replacement at your own expense.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I GO OVER BUDGET?

There are no hard rules about going over budget, but please be very mindful if you do. Going slightly over the top end of your budget is understandable, and we don't expect you to micromanage your costs/receipts. However, going over to the point that you've reach the next budget up is inappropriate. Please plan ahead when selecting a budget and stick to it.

Most people sign up for the budget that they are able to afford -- please don't flaunt it if you go over budget. We are an inclusive community and would like everyone who wants to participate to be able to and to feel good about it. Some of the best boxes are ones that are thoughtful and personalized, not necessarily the biggest or most costly.

I SELL DOG STUFF...CAN I PROVIDE ITEMS FROM MY OWN SHOP?

Yes, but they should be kept to just 1-2 items and are still counted towards the budget at retail value. We limit the number of items from shop owners because we never want exchange boxes to feel like an "advertisement" for a business. Secret Pup Exchange is about making friends and sending gifts to dogs, not about gaining new customers or promoting your shop.

IS IT OKAY TO TELL MY SECRET PUP WHO I AM?

No, and Yes! Matches should remain a secret for the entire exchange, until the box you curate is opened by the recipient. When you ship your box, you should add a note or something that says who the package is from, including your Instagram handle. This way, they can thank you properly in the Group Chat, especially since everyone is required to do that.

I'M A BIT SHY...DO I HAVE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE GROUP CHAT?

Participating in the Group Chat is one of the biggest requirements we have. This is the best way to get to know the pup(s) and human(s) you are matched to. Plus, group chats have proven to be a great place to ask questions and share your thoughts and opinions. WARNING: participating in our Group Chats may cause friendships to be made!

WHY DOES THE PACKAGE I SEND NEED TO HAVE TRACKING?

A shipment tracking number is the only way we can confirm that your package has been sent. Also, we use a tracking app to watch the progress of all exchange packages. One of the best parts of the hosts' jobs is when we post Out For Delivery stories, announcing when someone's package is scheduled to arrive that day. Plus, a tracking number allows the sender to submit claims with the shipping company, should any problems arise with the package.

WHY IS THERE A SHIPPING WINDOW?

In the past, we've had some participants join SPE and then ship within a few days of getting their match. That short amount of time doesn't allow for a well curated box of gifts, which is what SPE is known for. On the flip side, shipping after the shipping window closes doesn't give the recipient a sense of importance and often leaves them in a rush to complete their own exchange requirements.

As you can imagine, there is a lot of behind-the-scenes work going on with gift exchanges of this size. The hosts plan their schedules to be able to maintain and support everything that needs to be done during package shipments and arrivals. We instituted a shipping window to help keep the entire exchange on schedule.

CAN'T I JUST THANK MY SECRET PUP PRIVATELY?

Your Secret Pup deserves a proper Thank You for the time they spent getting to know you and curating a box especially for your pup(s). Saying Thank You in the group chat is a way to share all the effort your SP made for your pup(s) with the group of friends you've spent weeks chatting with. Sharing a post or reel to publicly thank your SP for your box is overwhelmingly one of the most popular parts of the exchange. It doesn't have to be fancy! Collaborating with SPE (required) on your post/reel allows it to live forever on our Instagram page for current and future SPE participants to enjoy.

THERE SEEMS TO BE A LOT OF REQUIREMENTS...WHY IS THAT?

Nearly 4,000 packages have been sent since we started in 2019, so needless to say, we have learned what works and what doesn't. Time and again, in our participant feedback, we've heard about the amazing relationships that have developed from this exchange. It's something really special. We want every SPE participant to have the best experience possible, and part of that is making sure everyone is treated equally and fairly. Our rules and requirements have developed from this.

All information belongs to Secret Pup Exchange and cannot be used.