Responsible Education Abroad:

Best Practices for

Health, Safety, and Security

The Joint Task Force on Education Abroad Health, Safety, and Security was convened in the winter of 2020/21 by The Forum on Education Abroad and NAFSA: Association of International Educators to review and update good practices published in 2002 by a previous interorganizational task force on safety and responsibility in study abroad. The goal of the Joint Task Force was to outline basic expectations for health, safety, and security in education abroad that could be easily understood by a variety of audiences, from participants to policymakers.

This new document reflects changes and advances in education abroad management; a recognition of an expanded view of education abroad to include study, internships, service learning, and research abroad; and an appreciation of how issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion affect health, safety, and security.

The following statements of best practice have been developed to provide guidance to participants and their support networks, responsible personnel, and responsible organizations. The statements are intentionally general: they are not intended to account for all the many variations in education abroad programs and all health, safety, and security cases that will inevitably occur. When responding to any specific situation, those responsible must also rely upon their collective experience and judgment and the regulatory guidelines of their respective organizations.

For a comprehensive list of all of the considerations that responsible parties (sending and hosting) and personnel need to attend to, please see *The Standards of Good Practice for Education Abroad*. For more recommendations on considerations when developing, reviewing and restarting a program, please see Guidelines for Conducting Education Abroad. For a comprehensive list of competencies that professionals in education abroad should possess please see *NAFSA International Education Professional Competencies*.

Readers should review the document in its entirety to fully understand the expectations and limitations of all parties.

The use of letters is provided for ease of reference only and does not imply priority.

40

Participants

Definitions:

participant
individual who attends, provides, or teaches an education abroad program, including, but not limited to:
- program leader
- on-site administrator
- student

program
specific education abroad experience, including, but not limited to:
- regular offering of a faculty-led or instructor-led experience
- ongoing direct exchange opportunity
- regular offering of a host institution abroad
- internship opportunity
- service learning experience
- research

responsible party
individual responsible for specific task or program, including, but not limited to:
- advisor
- program leader
- education abroad director
- risk manager

DURING THE PRE-DEPARTURE PERIOD, PARTICIPANTS ARE EXPECTED TO:

A. Assume responsibility for personal preparation for the program and participate fully in orientations which include relevant health, safety, and security topics.

B. Read and carefully consider all materials issued by the responsible parties that relate to safety, health, legal, environmental, political, cultural, and religious conditions in the host location(s). Be familiar with current relevant resources and seek additional information before and during travel as needed.

C. Conduct research on the planned location(s) to visit with particular emphasis on health safety, and security concerns, as well as the current social, cultural, and political situations. This should also include information specific to identity and accessibility concerns.

D. Consider their physical and mental health, and other personal factors and identities that may have a bearing on a participant's wellbeing in the new context. Disclose to responsible parties accurate and complete disability, physical and mental health information.

E. Arrange for appropriate support while abroad which may include physical or mental health needs. Consider multiple means of communication with support networks and health care providers back home and identification of healthcare options while abroad.

84   F. Obtain and maintain appropriate health and travel insurance coverage, including
85   adequate evacuation coverage, during the program to include any extended
86   travel beyond the education abroad dates, and understand what exclusions
87   apply. Understand insurance basics and have insurance information readily
88   available including policy number and carrier contact information.

89   **DURING THE PROGRAM, PARTICIPANTS ARE EXPECTED TO:**
90   A. Comply with all terms of participation, codes of conduct, and emergency
91   protocols of the program.
92   B. Accept responsibility for their decisions and actions.
93   C. Behave in a manner that is respectful of the rights and wellbeing of others and
94   encourage others to behave in a similar manner.
95   D. Obey host-country laws and follow program guidance on respecting local and
96   national customs.
97   E. Understand the components of risky behavior, both inherently and in a cultural
98   context, and how to behave appropriately. Make decisions that are well-informed
99   and supportive of your wellbeing.
100 F. Communicate actively any needs / concerns to responsible parties and the
101   participant's support network.
102 G. Know how to access health care, safety, and security assistance in the host
103   location.
104 H. Recognize that if there are any issues too challenging to continue to address, a
105   return home is always an option to explore.

106 **UPON RETURN, PARTICIPANTS ARE EXPECTED TO:**
107 A. Complete all post-travel health activities (e.g., sexually transmitted disease
108   testing, infectious disease mitigation) that are appropriate or required by
109   responsible parties or local health departments.
110 B. Communicate actively any health, safety, or security concerns to responsible
111   parties.
112 C. Address any ongoing physical or mental health concerns.
113 D. Recognize in advance that re-entry may often be the most challenging part of the
114   experience; identify resources to utilize during this time.

115 **PARTICIPANTS RECOGNIZE LIMITS TO THEIR EXPECTATIONS AND:**
116 A. Recognize there is inherent risk in any travel, including for education abroad.
117 B. Understand that responsible organizations cannot guarantee the health, safety,
118   or security of the participant and may be limited in their capacity to assist.

Support Networks

Definition:

Individuals or groups who provide the participant with practical or emotional support, which may include a participant's parents, guardians, family members, friends, spouses, or significant others. Any support network is by invitation of the participant with expectations as appropriate.

SUPPORT NETWORKS ARE EXPECTED TO:

A. Be part of the participant's decision-making process when selecting the appropriate education abroad program, including but not limited to financial, legal, or medical considerations.
B. Maintain contact with the participant as appropriate.

If identified as an emergency contact by the participant, a member of the support network should:
C. Be available in case of emergency or crisis
D. Be available in the event the participant becomes incapacitated and they need to advocate on behalf of the participant

SUPPORT NETWORKS RECOGNIZE LIMITS TO THEIR EXPECTATIONS AND:

A. Cannot accept responsibility on behalf of the participant.
B. Cannot expect to be the first line of contact between the participant and the program.
C. Must recognize the limitations for sharing records and privacy (e.g. FERPA, HIPAA, and GDPR).
D. Cannot arrive on the program uninvited or expect to participate in program activities.

Responsible Personnel

Definitions

responsible organization
entity responsible for the execution of a program or portfolio of programs, including, but not limited to:
- university
- college
- program provider organization
- partner
- education abroad office
- professional school

partner
party involved in the processes of sending *students* abroad or receiving students abroad (when at least two parties are involved), including, but not limited to:
- home institution
- host institution

159   - independent provider
160   - consortium
161   - travel or logistics provider
162   - government agency
163   - scholarship organization
164
165   **personnel**
166   individual(s) with responsibility for any aspect of the portfolio or program, including, but not limited to:
167   - full-time and/or part-time faculty
168   - hourly employees
169   - administrators
170   - staff
171   - paraprofessionals (e.g., student employees, interns, graduate assistants, and volunteers)
172

RESPONSIBLE PERSONNEL ARE EXPECTED TO:

173
174   A. Support a healthy, safe, and secure environment for all personnel and
175   participants.
176   B. Commit to inclusion and accessibility in all processes to support student health,
177   safety, and security.
178   C. Develop accurate marketing information about the respective location(s).
179   D. Collaborate with partners to ensure that destinations, itineraries, and activities
180   are consistent with health, safety, and security policies of the responsible
181   institution.
182   E. Understand and convey the provisions, processes, and exclusions of the
183   institutional insurance policy covering participants on the program.
184   F. Seek relevant and current knowledge about the health, safety, and security of
185   education abroad offerings or about local conditions.
186   G. Remain informed, through ongoing professional development, of best practices
187   related to student services in education abroad appropriate to area of
188   responsibility.
189   H. Provide participants with up-to-date health, safety, and security information so
190   that each participant they can make informed decisions about their participation
191   in programs.
192   I. Develop and maintain communication protocols, emergency management, and
193   response plans.
194   J. Provide both pre-departure and onsite orientations to participants.
195   K. Conduct regular reviews on a scheduled basis of policies, processes and
196   services that support health, safety, and security.

RESPONSIBLE PERSONNEL RECOGNIZE LIMITS TO THEIR EXPECTATIONS

197
198   AND:
199   A. Cannot guarantee or assure the health, safety, or security of participants or
200   eliminate all risk from the education abroad environment.
201   B. Cannot monitor or control all the daily personal decisions, choices, or activities of
202   participants.

203 C. Cannot prevent participants from engaging in illegal, dangerous, or unwise
204   activities.
205 D. Cannot be expected to offer health advice or administer any medications unless
206   authorized to do so on the program.
207 E. Cannot assure that home-country standards of due process apply in international
208   legal proceedings or provide or pay for legal representation for participants.
209 F. Cannot assume responsibility for actions or for events that are not part of the
210   program, nor for those that are beyond the control of partners, nor for situations
211   that may arise due to the failure of a participant to disclose pertinent information.
212 G. Recognize that all personnel are bound by the legal and regulatory environments
213   of the countries in which the program is based, which may limit the information
214   they are able to share with partners or with participants' parents, families, or
215   support networks.

Responsible Organizations

216

Definitions

217

responsible organization
218
entity responsible for the execution of a *program* or *portfolio of programs*, including, but not limited to:
219
- university
220
- college
221
- program provider organization
222
- *partner*
223
- education abroad office
224
- professional school
225

226
partner
227
party involved in the processes of sending *students* abroad or receiving students abroad (when at least
228
two parties are involved), including, but not limited to:
229
- home institution
230
- host institution
231
- independent provider
232
- consortium
233
- travel or logistics provider
234
- government agency
235
- scholarship organization
236

237
institution
238
entity that provides education as its main purpose, including, but not limited to, a school, college,
239
university, or training center
240

241
organization
242
entity involved in providing *education abroad programs*
243

244
The Responsible Organization may be different for each program or institution. Such institutions are often
245
accredited or sanctioned by the relevant national, regional, or discipline-specific education authorities or
246
equivalent authorities. Educational institutions may also be operated by private organizations, including,
247
but not limited to, religious bodies, special interest groups, or private educational and training enterprises,
248

249 both for-profit and nonprofit. An institution may be referred to as an *organization*, but not all organizations
250 are institutions.

RESPONSIBLE ORGANIZATIONS ARE EXPECTED TO:

251

252 A. Maintain policies related to health, safety and security information and inform
253 participants of these policies.
254 B. Understand the legal contexts around privacy and information sharing in the
255 countries in which they are operating.
256 C. Collaborate with partners to establish clearly defined roles and responsibilities
257 with respect to supporting the health, safety, and security of participants.
258 D. Provide training for personnel and participants to support effective and accurate
259 awareness and implementation of health, safety and security protocols, behavior
260 management, and emergency management before, during, and after the
261 education abroad program.
262 E. Provide appropriate equity, diversity, and inclusion training to all partners.
263 F. Conduct periodic review of partnerships to include services that support the
264 health, safety, and security of participants.
265 G. Provide information to participants regarding limits of the organization's
266 responsibility and the range of participants' experiences abroad that are beyond
267 their control.
268 H. Vet all vendors and contractors (e.g. travel and tour agents) with the program's
269 established procedures.
270 I. Evaluate the organization's risk tolerance and develop ongoing risk assessment
271 and mitigation measures that leverage available support for health, safety, and
272 security.
273 J. Develop and maintain emergency preparedness processes and an emergency
274 response plan, including a communication plan for all stakeholders.
275 K. Establish procedures for reporting health, safety, and security incidents (i.e.,
276 discrimination, physical assault, and/or sexual misconduct) to all responsible
277 parties.
278 L. Develop policies for program cancellation and evacuation in the event of a
279 health, safety or security emergency.
280 M. Conduct a post program review with all partners.
281 N. Consider behavior and disciplinary history of participants that may impact the
282 health, safety, and security of the participant and others.
283 O. Develop and communicate codes of conduct for all participants as well as
284 consequences of noncompliance in advance of program participation.
285 P. Maintain current knowledge about location specific laws, regulations and
286 protections that may or may not be accorded to participants.
287 Q. Consider the impacts on health, safety, and security of host environments of
288 programs being proposed or conducted, to mitigate risk to those communities.
289 R. Provide information for participants regarding program start and end dates and
290 the limits to the responsible organizations' responsibility related to the program.
291 S. Provide comprehensive orientation to participants.

292 T. Develop policies for program cancellation in the event of situations that could potentially
293   jeopardize a participant's health, safety and/or security, including contingency planning
294   that addresses evacuation of participants
295 U. Provide information about health, safety, and security and program conditions,
296   including access to and quality of health and emergency services, to prospective
297   participants so that they can make informed decisions concerning choice of
298   program, preparation, participation, and behavior while on the program.
299 V. Assess the program experience by including in participant evaluations questions
300   related to health, safety, and security, and access to appropriate services
301
302 **RESPONSIBLE ORGANIZATIONS RECOGNIZE LIMITS TO THEIR**
303 **EXPECTATIONS AND:**
304 A. Cannot guarantee or assure the safety or security of participants or eliminate all
305   risks from the education abroad environments.
306 B. Cannot monitor or control the daily personal decisions, choices, and activities of
307   participants.
308 C. Cannot prevent participants from engaging in illegal, dangerous, or unwise
309   activities.
310 D. Cannot assure that home country laws and standards of due process apply in
311   overseas legal proceedings or provide or pay for legal representation for
312   participants.
313 E. Cannot assume responsibility for actions or events that are not part of the
314   program, nor for those that are beyond the control of the responsible party and its
315   subcontractors, nor for situations that may arise due to the failure of a participant
316   to disclose pertinent information.
317 F. Cannot prevent discrimination occurring within the host country environment.
318   Responsible organizations can work to develop settings and training that
319   minimize the probability and provide redress and communication with the
320   participant and home institution.
321 G. Cannot ensure support before program start date or after program end date.
322
323
324 The following are additional resources for information on health, safety, and security for
325 education abroad:
326
327   www.cdc.gov/travel
328   www.forumea.org
329   www.nafsa.org/ea
330   www.osac.gov
331   travel.state.gov
332   www.who.int
333   https://tripprep.com/
334
335

336 Members of the Joint Task Force were appointed by NAFSA: Association of
337 International Educators and The Forum on Education Abroad or recruited through an
338 open application. The Forum and NAFSA wish to thank the following task force
339 members for their collaboration on this project:
340

341 ● Keshia Abraham, Ph.D., Founder and President at Abraham Consulting Agency.
342 *Representing The Forum Council*

343 ● Catherine Ebelke PA-C, CTH; Physician Assistant, Certificate in Travel Health,
344 Montana State University - Bozeman. *Representing the American College Health*
345 *Association*

346 ● Michelle Dippold, M.Ed., Study Abroad Coordinator, Otterbein University

347 ● Darla Domke Damonte, Ph.D., Associate Provost for Global Initiatives, Coastal
348 Carolina University

349 ● Caroline Donovan White, M.A., Senior Director for Education Abroad Services,
350 NAFSA: Association of International Educators

351 ● Jason Hope, M.S., Director of International Health, Safety and Security,
352 University of Kentucky. *Representing the NAFSA Education Abroad Knowledge*
353 *Community*

354 ● Barbara Lindeman, M.S., Director of International Health, Safety and Security,
355 University of Missouri. *Representing Pulse: Association of International Safety*
356 *and Security Professionals in Higher Education, Inc.*

357 ● Patricia C. Martin, Director for Off-Campus Study, Swarthmore College. Chair of
358 the Interassociational Advisory Committee on Health and Safety (2002-2014)

359 ● Natalie A. Mello, M.A., Vice President for Programs, Services and Training, The
360 Forum on Education Abroad

361 ● Caylie Middleton, MS.Ed., Associate Director of Education Abroad, University of
362 Maryland, Baltimore County

363 ● Ahmad Refky, Associate Vice President of Operations, Verto Education

364 ● Christine Sprovieri, M.S. Director of International Travel Risk Management,
365 Brown University. *Representing the Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC)*
366 *Academia Sector Committee*