Guiding Questions and Resources for Students Considering Volunteering Abroad

Are you interested in volunteering abroad, but not sure where to start? Use these questions to help begin your search. You might find it helpful to write your responses to these questions as well as take notes about organizations you may want to work with in the future.

THE BASICS
There are several ways to approach looking for an international volunteer opportunity:
• Where do you want to go? Will you already be there (e.g., studying abroad)?
• What issues inspire you? What issues or causes are you passionate about?
• What would you like to be doing?
• What can you offer? Do you have any special skills, knowledge, experience or abilities?
• What population of people would you like to be working with?
• How much time are you planning to devote? (Some organizations are looking for a minimum of three months full-time commitment; others may accept shorter time periods.)
• Do you want to be in a group of other volunteers, or on your own?

LOGISTICS AND MONEY
• How much money do you want to spend? Typical expenses include:
  o Travel from the U.S. to the country you’ll be volunteering in
  o In-country travel—both to the region/town/city you’ll be working in, and potentially costs to commute from your housing to the organization
  o Housing in-country
  o Meals, including while traveling and while on-site
  o Equipment or training costs
  o Insurance (medical, travel, emergency evacuation)
  o Communication costs (e.g., internet cafés, phone cards, cell phone roaming fees, or SIM card rental)
  o Entertainment costs
  o Medical costs, including preventative medications (e.g., vaccinations or malaria pills)
  o Emergencies
  o Program Fees, which may include some of the above, but is often at least in part to support the operation of the organization or program.
• How will you get there?
• Do you speak the language(s) spoken in that region and/or by the people you will be working with? If not, is it typical for someone who does not speak the language to travel and/or volunteer there?
• If it is not already included in the experience, how will you find a place to stay and transportation to and from the service site each day?
PREPARATION, RISK, AND RELATIONSHIPS

- Why do you want to volunteer abroad?
- How familiar are you with the area you’ll be visiting?
- What will you need to do to adapt to life in that area?
- How will you prepare to enter the community you’ll be visiting? Do you know about the language, cultural taboos, history of the region and country?
- Why does the organization you’ll be volunteering with exist? How did it get started? Does it fill a need defined by the community, or did it come from outside that community?
- Who runs the organization?
- What kind of training will you need to do the work you’ll be doing? How will you get it?
- Given the amount of time you’ll be there, and your current level of expertise, what’s the balance of benefits? How much “investment” will the organization need to put into your training and preparation, and how much will you be able to offer?
- How have you have you explored the issues you may come into contact with?
- How will you continue to remain connected to those issues and the community you’ll be visiting once you return home?
- Is this an experience you could get within the U.S., especially given the amount of time you will be devoting and your current level of expertise/skill?
- How will you remain connected to home while abroad?
- What plans do you have in case of emergency? (Medical emergency? Family emergency? Natural disaster? Political unrest?)
- Is there someone nearby who will know where you are and be able to support you in case of an emergency?

SOME HELPFUL ONLINE RESOURCES

Some helpful resources to help find opportunities, evaluate programs, and to guide you in deciding whether international service is right for you:

- **International Volunteer Programs Association**: [www.volunteeringinternational.org](http://www.volunteeringinternational.org)
- **International Volunteerism Resource Center**: [www.idealist.org/info/IntlVolunteer](http://www.idealist.org/info/IntlVolunteer)
- **Transitions Abroad**: [www.transitionsabroad.com](http://www.transitionsabroad.com)
- **Idealist.org**: [www.idealist.org](http://www.idealist.org)
- **Verge Magazine**: [www.vergemagazine.com](http://www.vergemagazine.com)
- **Guidestar**: [www.guidestar.org](http://www.guidestar.org) (find tax info for U.S.-based nonprofit organizations)

See also:

- **International Internships Guide from Career Services**
- UVM Office of International Education (essential if you are seeking credit-bearing opportunities), [www.uvm.edu/~oies](http://www.uvm.edu/~oies)