



International Experiential Learning: Evaluating Third Party Providers

Internationalization is central to Western University's mission as outlined in its Strategic Plan: *Achieving Excellence on the World Stage*. International experiential learning such as internships and community engaged learning bring substantial benefits to students, the University, and the host community. These benefits include knowledge exchange, capacity and skill development, and cross-cultural learning.

Western University encourages and promotes global citizenship and awareness and is currently working to expand opportunities for students to participate in international experiences. With this growth comes potential risk. Ethical and sustainable partnerships with reputable organizations lessen this risk and uphold the University's reputation.

For this reason, it is important to have a guideline in place for vetting potential partners and third party providers of international experiences. The principles discussed here are reflective of Western's Institutional Principles and Values. In order to benefit all stakeholders, Third Party Providers should be carefully monitored on an ongoing basis.

If students are considering a partnership with a partner or third party provider, we recommend using the below principles and questions, as guidelines for investigating the partner and before partnering.

1. Legitimacy of the Third Party Provider

- a. What is the reputation of the organization?
- b. Does the organization exploit vulnerable populations in marketing and program material?
- c. How long has the organization been active, and what is its track record?
- d. Is there a mechanism for contacting former participants?
- e. Is the operation transparent? Review annual report, funding sources
- f. What types of programs are offered by the organization?
- g. Who else partners with the organization? Any universities?
- h. How many employees does the organization have?
- i. What is the cost of the experience, and what is included in the cost?
- j. Is the organization interested in genuine partnerships and relations with local communities and host organizations?

2. Risk Management

- a. Are emergency plans, policies and practices in place with in-country organizations?
- b. Are participants ensured secure and appropriate accommodations?
- c. Does the Third Party Provider offer experiences in countries where we already have relationships?
- d. Does the Third Party Provider monitor the government travel safety warnings and prohibit travel to certain areas, accordingly?
- e. Is there in-country support? (office, staff)
- f. How does the organization screen potential participants?

- g. Does the organization provide insurance for participants?

3. Quality of Experience

- a. Does the placement meet the High Impact Practice Guidelines?
- **Time on task:** A student's participation must be significant enough to enhance learning, through meaningful activities.
 - **Encourage interaction:** A student's participation in the activity should encourage her or him to interact with other students, local community members, and organizational staff. This will allow for a more collaborative and social learning experience.
 - **Provide feedback:** A student's participation in the activity must be accompanied by feedback, provided by staff/faculty or peers. The feedback should focus on the student's performance on the identified activity, allowing for effective assessment of current knowledge and skills, and action planning for future development.
 - **Engage in reflection:** A student's participation in the activity should allow her or him to critically reflect on the experience, improving self-awareness and enhancing the ability to apply learning from past experiences.
 - **Link learning:** A student's participation in the activity should allow her or him to achieve meaningful learning and encourage the student to connect learning from different experiences to future academic and co-curricular endeavours.
 - **Promote high expectations:** A student's participation in the activity should be accompanied by high expectations, communicated by the program owner or supervisor, and should encourage the student to achieve meaningful results.
- b. Is necessary training and orientation provided?
- c. Is the student given a defined role and purpose?
- d. Is the work commensurate with the student's knowledge and skill level?

4. Partnerships with Host Organizations

- a. Is the in-country host involved in establishing goals and planning the projects?
- b. How does the host community benefit?
- c. How is community/host impact measured?
- d. Does the Third Party Provider have long-standing, mutually beneficial partnerships with local hosts/communities?
- e. Is the host community or in-country organization provided any resources to lessen the burden of hosting students?
- f. Will the student's presence displace local employment?



Values:

Respect

We value the strength that comes from diversity and believe that all people should be treated equally. We honour local knowledge and recognize the many ways of knowing.

Social Responsibility

We believe in social justice and that universities have a role to play in transferring technology and in building new knowledge with international partners.

Partnership

We seek to foster international partnerships in research, teaching and service that are mutually beneficial and reciprocal. It is through self-reflexive practice that we actively mitigate asymmetrical power relationships.

Integrity

We continually seek best practices in our collaborations and are transparent and accountable in our project work to build strong relationships

Empowerment

We believe that people can make a difference. We believe that people can create change and find solutions to the challenges in their lives with knowledge and resources; that solidarity in social justice, and not charity results in respectful collaboration.

Innovation and Learning

We promote awareness of the interconnectedness amongst people and recognize that global issues are universal. We have a commitment to learning and to facilitating intercultural awareness and global citizenship through building bridges to break through notions of 'other.' By collaborating with international partners on global issues, we will build new knowledge together and arrive at innovative solutions.

Interdisciplinary

Not only international collaboration, but interdisciplinary teams will lead to building new knowledge and innovation