



**An Education Abroad  
Professional's Guide to**

---

**ONLINE GLOBAL  
LEARNING  
EXPERIENCES**

THE  
FORUM  
ON EDUCATION  
ABROAD

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Forum thanks the following individuals for their contribution to the preparation of this Guide:

Mohamed Abdel-Kader, Kyle Kastler, Andie Shafer, Henry Shepherd, Christine Shiau, *Stevens Initiative*

Kris Acheson-Clair, *Purdue University*

Bibi Al-Ebrahim, *Amizade*

Lori Citti, *Johns Hopkins University*

Mary Lou Forward, *SUNY Center for Collaborative Online International Learning*

Eric Hartman, *Haverford College*

Hilary Kahn, *IUPUI & Indiana University*

Jillian Low, *CRCC Asia & Virtual Internships*

Raluca Nahorniac, *University of Maryland*

Linda Rust, *RMIT University*

Carine Ullom, *Ottawa University & UNICollaboration*

Jennifer Wiley, *CoreCollaborative International & James Madison University*

Members of of the 2019-2020 Forum Council

© 2020 The Forum on Education Abroad.

ISBN: 978-1-952376-06-1

doi.org/10.36366/G.978-1-952376-06-1

The Forum on Education Abroad

PO Box 1713

Carlisle, PA, USA 17013

The Forum on Education Abroad is hosted by Dickinson College.

[www.forumea.org](http://www.forumea.org)

# INTRODUCTION

Online global learning experiences can result in deep intercultural exchange and achieve many of the same goals that are set for education abroad. They can also complement or provide a pathway to future international mobility for students who participate. As with education abroad opportunities, education abroad professionals can be a driving force in the development and implementation of online global learning experiences by helping to seek out opportunities, build partnerships, advise students of their options, and help instructors to identify learning goals for international experiences that extend beyond specific academic disciplines.

With that in mind, we've prepared this guide for education abroad professionals who are new to online global learning experiences and want to learn more about how to do them well. While this guide is mainly about the diverse practices that fall under the header 'virtual exchange,' we are intentionally choosing to use the term Online Global Learning Experiences because many of the principles and recommendations are just as applicable to other forms of online international learning programs and experiences. This guide is intended as an introduction to a broad range of curricular or co-curricular global learning experiences that happen partially or completely online, including: collaborative project-based learning, one-on-one or small-group language learning practice, videoconference dialogues, courses paired across institutions who work together, remote internships or group consulting projects for companies located abroad, or community engagement or service-learning projects conducted online in collaboration with a community partner overseas, and more.

The key components of high-quality online global learning experiences are:

- Personal, authentic, engaging
- Intensive and/or sustained
- Collaborative
- Intercultural (international)
- Intentional and supported
- Mediated by technology

In this guide, we help orient education abroad professionals accustomed to organizing and/or vetting primarily in-person international programming to the unique considerations they must take into account while transitioning existing programming online, developing new online global learning opportunities, and/or evaluating third-party online offerings on behalf of their students. The Member Resources section on [this page](#) includes a variety of resources sourced from other institutions and organizations with expertise in virtual exchanges and online learning in higher education to support you in your work.

While online global learning experiences have unique considerations, many of the facets of supporting participants' personal, social, intercultural, academic, and career development are similar to what we're accustomed to in the field of education abroad. Your experience and expertise apply here, too! With that in mind, remember that the [\*Standards of Good Practice for Education Abroad\*](#) should always be a primary reference and guide. The guidance that follows is organized to follow the format of the 6<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Standards of Good Practice* and allow for easy use of these resources in tandem.

For additional guidance for specific program types, we also encourage you to consult the following:

- [Guidelines for Internships Abroad](#)
- [Guidelines for Community Engagement, Service-Learning and Volunteer Experiences Abroad](#)
- [Guidelines for Undergraduate Research, Field Studies, and Independent Study Projects Abroad](#)
- [Guidelines for Undergraduate Health Experiences Abroad](#)
- [Guidelines for Language Learning Abroad](#)

# GUIDING PRINCIPLES

## 4.1\* MISSION AND GOALS

- a. Consider online global experiences as a part of a global learning portfolio. They play different roles in your internationalization efforts and they complement one another. Participation in online experiences need not replace in-person experiences nor vice versa.
- b. Ensure that goals for the online experience are clearly established. Note that specific goals need not all be shared by all partners involved in the exchange, but that partners should ensure that goals are aligned and can be met by all sides within the parameters of the shared experience.
  1. Program goals should strive to offer some kind of benefit for all participants, even if the benefit is not the same.
- c. Set realistic goals with the medium of communication in mind, e.g., communicating across difference, teamwork, intercultural competence, project management and execution, self-awareness, written and oral language skills.
- d. Plan to assess participants' achievement of the agreed-upon learning goals.
- e. Make a plan to evaluate the success of an online global learning experience, especially if this is the first iteration, in order to plan for improvement in future iterations. Consider using assessments and evidence already available in the form of student assignments, participation rates recorded in online learning platforms, partner and participant reflections and surveys, online polling during synchronous sessions, etc.

## 4.2 COLLABORATION AND TRANSPARENCY

- a. Facilitate frequent and open communication via real-time meetings between faculty/staff facilitators of the online global learning experience before the program begins and throughout the experience.
- b. When planning online experiences on short timelines, consider starting with what you know. Draw on partnerships that already exist between faculty or departments. Encourage colleagues to reach out to research collaborators.
  1. Build time into the planning and implementation schedule for faculty/staff to spend time getting to know each other, build rapport, and ensure that goals are aligned, whether this is a new partnership or an existing relationship.
- c. Many of the same guidelines for being a good partner for in-person programming apply to online global learning experiences, as well. Refer to our [Guidelines for Good Business Partnerships](#) for more details.



### 4.3 ETHICS

- a. The lack of in-person contact between facilitators and participants can heighten the importance of respect for the cultures, values, and ways of working of partners, students, and community members involved in the online experience. In an online environment you may need to remind yourself and your participants of this more often than you would if physically immersed in another culture.
- b. As you co-design your online global learning experience with your partner(s), consider the availability of different technologies in your partner's location.
  1. If you plan to use a particular technology tool, check with your partner(s) to see if it is available and accessible in their location.
  2. Keep in mind the potential cost of installing or maintaining new technology, particularly partners of lesser economic means or in communities where internet access is less readily available. Consider using the technology of the more tech-limited partners so that all partners and participants can engage fully in the experience.
- c. Ensure that any recording of audio and/or video of live sessions and any written, audio, or video materials collected during the online experience are collected with the specific, informed consent of all participants (including staff, participants, and any other community members, partners, collaborators, visitors to the online format). Do not share any of this material publicly or use it for promotional purposes without express permission from all parties.
- d. Acquire agreement from all participants regarding the use of social media to share their experiences with people outside of the program, whether for personal or promotional purposes.

### 4.4 EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION

- a. Online programming solves some issues to access to meaningful global learning experiences, but potentially creates others. While cost can be reduced and passports and visas are unnecessary, the need for technology presents other challenges for participants.
- b. Be equitable across partnerships by striving to arrange planning activities and online experiences during times of the year/week/day that are mutually convenient (or equitably inconvenient) to all sides. When possible, vary meeting times so that meetings at inconvenient times do not disproportionately fall to participants in one location.
- c. Make use of all available resources to ensure technology is accessible to participants of all needs and abilities, e.g., use captioning tools, ensure that documents and websites are readable by screen readers and other assistive technology, access to translators if partners are in countries that speak different languages, etc.
- d. It may be challenging for all participants to have access to 24/7 internet with sufficient bandwidth and other necessary technology, e.g., microphone, webcam. Be mindful of these limitations when planning the online global learning experience.
  1. Consider using the platforms participants have readily available in all locations, i.e., if computer availability is limited for some participants, use WhatsApp or other mobile messaging systems on mobile devices rather than computer-based video conferencing software.
  2. Offer participants assistance (financial or otherwise) to aid in accessing necessary technologies to the extent possible.

e. Understand that not all participants will feel comfortable using video when they connect to synchronous sessions. While seeing faces can give the feeling of more personal interaction, there are many reasons that a participant may prefer not to use their video some or all of the time, including:

- Lack of access to webcam
- Low bandwidth
- Cultural norms about showing one's face or body
- ['Zoom fatigue'](#)
- What appears behind a participant can reveal things about their personal lives or living situations that they may not be comfortable sharing. Video conferencing from home reveal things about students that classroom or in-person formats do not. ([More on this from The New York Times.](#))

f. Discuss explicitly and decide in advance what language(s) will be used by faculty/staff and participants.

1. Do not assume that English will be used just because it is a world *lingua franca*.
2. Where feasible, seek ways to incorporate participants' languages into aspects of the experience, even if they are not the primary language of communication for the program.

## ADMINISTRATIVE FRAMEWORK

### 5.1 POLICIES, PROCEDURES, AND GUIDELINES

- a. Identify and communicate clear expectations for participants' connectedness and participation in synchronous group meetings as well as expectations for frequency, length, and nature of contributions to asynchronous formats such as chats, discussion forums, written assignments, etc.
  1. Take into consideration the possible accessibility barriers mentioned in 4.4.e above when outlining these norms and expectations.
- b. Build flexibility into the plan for the online experience. If the power goes out in one location of the partnership for a day, a flexible schedule from the outset will make it easier to make up for lost time later.
  1. It can help to be transparent about this with participants and partners! Openness about the process and its challenges can bolster participant patience and buy-in.
- c. Establish a clear Code of Conduct for appropriate online behavior and make this available to all participants. Include consideration for: offensive language and content (which may be seen through a different cultural lens), culturally inappropriate behavior, cyber bullying, and more. Ensure that the code addresses consequences for inappropriate behaviors.
  1. This can be done, in part, as a group activity that engages participants in the process early in the program.
  2. Many colleges and universities already have anti-bullying and harassment policies and resources. Look to these for guidance.

- d. Establish pathways for participants to safely report instances of cyber bullying, inappropriate communications, or sharing of offensive or harmful content by other participants.
  - 1. Prepare faculty and staff to respond to these particular kinds of reports.
- e. Have a plan for facilitators/instructors to actively monitor participant interactions, especially early in the program, e.g., faculty member may periodically drop in on small group meetings to ensure that participants are comfortable and working productively together.
- f. Because online global learning experiences often occur across different time zones, it is essential to ensure fair calculation and awarding of credit-hours for time spent on courses that may include significant portions of asynchronous engagement.
  - 1. At colleges and universities, consult with your Teaching and Learning Center and/or Registrar to see if a calculator already exists at your institution.
- g. Ensure compliance with internet and data privacy laws for all locations where participants and faculty/staff are located.
- c. Provide faculty and staff with tech-support or information about how they can access support provided by a third-party.
- d. Prepare faculty and staff for the role that they will have to play in facilitating safe and meaningful exchange through expectation-setting, posing relevant questions and prompts, and ensuring all participants have the opportunity to express themselves in a safe and thoughtful manner.
- e. Consider offering faculty and staff incentives, such as additional remuneration for time spent developing an exchange in this format, particularly if it requires changing a course that was previously developed to be delivered in person.
- f. Replicate proven existing models where possible. See the Member Resources section [on this page](#) for examples.
- g. Reach out to colleagues at your institution in units like Instructional Technology, Center for Teaching and Learning, Online Learning, and Continuing Education to build partnerships and learn from their experience and expertise.
- h. Have explicit conversations about payment and the value of online or remote work before the experience begins, especially when working with community providers or others outside of traditional higher education formats.

## 5.2 FINANCIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES

- a. Provide training, support, and access to resources for faculty, staff, and community partners engaged in designing and facilitating online global learning experiences. Consider making this a full-time staff role to ensure program sustainability in the long-term.
- b. Ensure that faculty and staff have access to and are comfortable using the technology that best supports the goals of the experience.
  - 1. Those who are not accustomed to facilitating online experiences should practice using the technology and online tools prior to the start of the program to minimize mishaps.

# STUDENT LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

## 6.1 BEFORE PROGRAM

- a. Strive for balance in participant numbers across locations to encourage more contact with peers from other places.
- b. Expectation setting is as important for online global learning as it is for in-person education abroad. Help participants prepare to navigate the academic and intercultural challenges that can be expected from any global learning experience, in addition to specific expectations related to participating in an exchange using an online format.
- c. Clearly outline and communicate policies regarding participant conduct and expectations for participation online.
- d. Communicate the necessary technology that will be required by participants to fully participate in the online experience, e.g., microphone, webcam, internet access (hours/day and bandwidth minimums), etc.
  1. Endeavor to assist participants in accessing these things if they do not already have the technology available and acquiring it is cost-prohibitive for them.
  2. Consider running a tech rehearsal with participants before the substantive work of the program begins.
  3. Consider allowing participants to communicate with their peers using a platform they agree on rather than having all communications come through one pre-selected technology tool. You can require a specific platform for assignments and other course work, while allowing participants to communicate via tools that are more comfortable to them.
- e. Ensure open channels of communication between participants and faculty/staff and let participants know how to make use of these to convey issues related to internet access, illness, or other inability to participate without fear of repercussions.
- f. Provide participants with tips for making the most of online collaboration.
- g. Preparing participants for cross-cultural interactions is essential. Consider how online communication formats might require emphasis on new or different aspects of culture, bearing in mind, for example, that it can be harder to pick up on contextual cues than if participants were together in a common location.
- h. Point participants to resources that support their [safety online](#).
- i. If your program will include long synchronous sessions or is taking place during a time when participants are also engaged in other work or learning online, help them think about how to manage mental and physical health when spending long hours at a computer, e.g., [avoiding eye strain](#), taking stretch breaks, etc.
- j. As you advise students on online global learning options, consider referencing our [Guidelines for Education Abroad Advising](#) for additional best practices in student advising for global learning experiences.



## 6.2 DURING PROGRAM

- a. Plan for plenty of ice-breaker and team-building activities early in and throughout the program to help participants get to know each other and feel comfortable communicating and working together in the online format.
- b. Include a mix of synchronous and asynchronous activities.
  1. Synchronous activities allow for rich and spontaneous personal interactions.
  2. Asynchronous activities allow for more reflection and intentional action, as well as allowing participants to take breaks as needed and complete some of their work at a time that is optimal for their schedule and location.
- c. When scheduling synchronous components:
  1. Be respectful of participants in different time zones.
  2. Allow extra time in the schedule for any technology issues that may arise or questions that participants may have about technology they are using.
  3. Synchronous online activities often take longer than expected. Budget time generously in your schedule.
  4. If a mutually convenient time is impossible, strive for a balance of meetings that are convenient for participants in each location.
- d. Employ multiple modes of communication and engagement.
  1. Make use of tools built into online platforms to keep participants engaged (e.g. polling, whiteboards, breakout rooms, etc.).
- e. Encourage open, honest communication for all faculty, staff, and participants.
- f. For small-group projects, internships, or other work that happens relatively independently, establish and follow through on regular, mandatory touchpoints between participant(s) and instructors/supervisors.
- g. Design collaborative assignments or research projects, discussion groups, role-playing activities, etc. that encourage frequent and deep interaction between participants in different locations.
- h. Consider designing the experience to result in project or portfolio deliverables that give participants something tangible to demonstrate what they have achieved through the online experience.
- i. Provide participants with opportunities to reflect on their personal, intercultural, academic, and professional growth early and often.
- j. Identify activities to keep participants motivated and engaged for the duration of the program.

## 6.3 AFTER PROGRAM

- a. Design opportunities to encourage participants to reflect on their personal, academic, intercultural, and professional growth.
- b. Plan for program alumni to engage with one another after the program ends.
- c. Provide guidance for how participants can pursue safe, respectful, appropriate ongoing communication/relationships with individuals they've met through the program.
- d. Connect participants to future online global learning or in-person education abroad experiences to build upon the global competencies they've developed through this experience.
- e. Prepare participants to articulate how their online global learning experience has impacted their interpersonal, intercultural, and career readiness skills.
  1. Consider creating in-person or online showcase formats to allow participants to share their work and practice these skills.
- f. If participants don't already have a passport, encourage them to get one!