

# 1 Responsible Education Abroad:

## 2 Best Practices for

### 3 Health, Safety, and Security

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

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

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

25  
26 For a comprehensive list of all of the considerations that responsible parties (sending  
27 and hosting) and personnel need to attend to, please see [The Standards of Good  
28 Practice for Education Abroad](#). For more recommendations on considerations when  
29 developing, reviewing and restarting a program, please see [Guidelines for Conducting  
30 Education Abroad](#). For a comprehensive list of competencies that professionals in  
31 education abroad should possess please see [NAFSA International Education  
32 Professional Competencies](#).

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

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38 The use of letters is provided for ease of reference only and does not imply priority.  
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## 41 **Participants**

### 42 **Definitions:**

#### 43 **participant**

44 individual who attends, provides, or teaches an education abroad program, including, but not limited to:

- 45 - program leader
- 46 - on-site administrator
- 47 - student

48

#### 49 **program**

50 specific education abroad experience, including, but not limited to:

- 51 - regular offering of a faculty-led or instructor-led experience
- 52 - ongoing direct exchange opportunity
- 53 - regular offering of a host institution abroad
- 54 - internship opportunity
- 55 - service learning experience
- 56 - research

57

#### 58 **responsible party**

59 individual responsible for specific task or program, including, but not limited to:

- 60 - advisor
- 61 - program leader
- 62 - education abroad director
- 63 - risk manager

64

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

- 66 A. Assume responsibility for personal preparation for the program and participate
- 67 fully in orientations which include relevant health, safety, and security topics.
- 68 B. Read and carefully consider all materials issued by the responsible parties that
- 69 relate to safety, health, legal, environmental, political, cultural, and religious
- 70 conditions in the host location(s). Be familiar with current relevant resources and
- 71 seek additional information before and during travel as needed.
- 72 C. Conduct research on the planned location(s) to visit with particular emphasis on
- 73 health safety, and security concerns, as well as the current social, cultural, and
- 74 political situations. This should also include information specific to identity and
- 75 accessibility concerns.
- 76 D. Consider their physical and mental health, and other personal factors and
- 77 identities that may have a bearing on a participant's wellbeing in the new context.
- 78 Disclose to responsible parties accurate and complete disability, physical and
- 79 mental health information.
- 80 E. Arrange for appropriate support while abroad which may include physical or
- 81 mental health needs. Consider multiple means of communication with support
- 82 networks and health care providers back home and identification of healthcare
- 83 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.

## 119 **Support Networks**

### 120 **Definition:**

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

### 124 **SUPPORT NETWORKS ARE EXPECTED TO:**

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

129  
130 If identified as an emergency contact by the participant, a member of the support  
131 network should:

- 132 C. Be available in case of emergency or crisis
- 133 D. Be available in the event the participant becomes incapacitated and they need to  
134 advocate on behalf of the participant

### 135 **SUPPORT NETWORKS RECOGNIZE LIMITS TO THEIR EXPECTATIONS AND:**

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

## 143 **Responsible Personnel**

### 144 **Definitions**

#### 145 **responsible organization**

146 entity responsible for the execution of a program or portfolio of programs, including, but not limited to:

- 147 - university
- 148 - college
- 149 - program provider organization
- 150 - partner
- 151 - education abroad office
- 152 - professional school

#### 153 **partner**

154 party involved in the processes of sending *students* abroad or receiving students abroad (when at least  
155 two parties are involved), including, but not limited to:

- 156 - home institution
- 157 - 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

173 **RESPONSIBLE PERSONNEL ARE EXPECTED TO:**

- 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.

197 **RESPONSIBLE PERSONNEL RECOGNIZE LIMITS TO THEIR EXPECTATIONS**  
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.

## 216 **Responsible Organizations**

### 217 **Definitions**

#### 218 **responsible organization**

219 entity responsible for the execution of a *program* or *portfolio of programs*, including, but not limited to:

- 220 - university
- 221 - college
- 222 - program provider organization
- 223 - *partner*
- 224 - education abroad office
- 225 - professional school

226

#### 227 **partner**

228 party involved in the processes of sending *students* abroad or receiving students abroad (when at least  
229 two parties are involved), including, but not limited to:

- 230 - home institution
- 231 - host institution
- 232 - independent provider
- 233 - consortium
- 234 - travel or logistics provider
- 235 - government agency
- 236 - scholarship organization

237

#### 238 **institution**

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

241

#### 242 **organization**

243 entity involved in providing *education abroad programs*

244

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

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

## 251 **RESPONSIBLE ORGANIZATIONS ARE EXPECTED TO:**

- 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  
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324 The following are additional resources for information on health, safety, and security for  
325 education abroad:  
326

327 [www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel)  
328 [www.forumea.org](http://www.forumea.org)  
329 [www.nafsa.org/ea](http://www.nafsa.org/ea)  
330 [www.osac.gov](http://www.osac.gov)  
331 [travel.state.gov](http://travel.state.gov)  
332 [www.who.int](http://www.who.int)  
333 <https://tripprep.com/>  
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