

Checklist Managing Study Abroad Programs in Independent Schools



In the modern global economy, educational opportunities abroad—especially in developing areas—have become very popular at independent schools. However, study abroad programs pose unique challenges for schools, especially those that have never offered overseas programs.

This checklist provides independent school administrators who oversee study abroad programs an overview of risk management considerations. It is not designed for adult trip leaders, volunteers, chaperones, or student participants and their parents. School administrators should indicate “yes” or “no” in the column to the right of each question and then consider what further steps they may wish to take.

1 Preparation for the Program

Schools should establish a formal approval process for all study abroad programs. A written approval policy ensures that consistent standards apply and that program leaders, student participants, and their parents are adequately prepared. In addition, schools should carefully consider whether to directly sponsor a program or contract with a third-party provider. A third-party provider can offer experience and expertise that a school lacks and reduce—although not eliminate—the school’s liability exposure.

Program Formation and Approval

- **Program Formation.** Does your school have a written policy that identifies which school officials have authority to determine:

Note: In this checklist, “study abroad programs” refers to any school-sponsored educational programs offered to students involving travel to a foreign country for up to one academic year. This includes programs delivered at foreign institutions or ad hoc, as well as short-term trips led by school faculty and experiential and service learning trips.

Actions Needed

- How study abroad programs are established? Yes No
- Where the school's students are permitted to travel on approved programs, including any countries to which travel is expressly prohibited, such as those with U.S. State Department travel warnings? Yes No
- Whether individuals who are not program leaders or current students, such as school alumni, donors, or family members of participants, may be allowed to participate in a program? Yes No
- Under what conditions an approved program may be suspended or canceled? Yes No

■ **Written Program Proposal.** Does your school require a formal written proposal for new programs that addresses:

- The trip location and duration? Yes No
- The academic purpose of the trip? Yes No
- Skills and qualifications needed by trip leaders? Yes No
- The type of housing needed or anticipated? Yes No
- An overview of any particular risks of the trip? Yes No

■ **Program Approval Process.** Does the approval process for a new program seek input from:

- The individual(s) responsible for overseeing global education? Yes No
- The CFO or other school official responsible for overseeing risk management? Yes No
- Legal counsel, both at home and at the proposed program site? Yes No
- A representative from the dean of students' office or an office that oversees academic programs? Yes No
- Student health and/or counseling? Yes No
- School security? Yes No

■ **School's Relationship to the Program**

- If your school directly sponsors the proposed program, do you:
 - Require written contracts with all program leaders, including school employees and volunteers? Yes No
 - Require written contracts with any other schools and service providers, such as tour operators, housing providers, and charter bus companies? Yes No

Actions Needed

- Establish requirements or guidelines for an appropriate leader to student ratio? Yes No
- Establish a requirement that each program, regardless of the number of students, has at least two adult leaders? Yes No
- Have a contingency plan in the event that program leaders are injured or unable to perform their duties? Yes No
- Establish practices to vet foreign host families with whom students will stay? Yes No
- If your school contracts with a third-party provider to deliver all or part of a program do you:
 - Evaluate the provider's experience and qualifications, such as its history running similar programs, references from other schools, approach to risk management, and vetting of any foreign host families? Yes No
 - Cover the following issues in a written contract:
 - Provider's emergency and crisis management protocols? Yes No
 - Orientation and on-site services provided for students? Yes No
 - Insurance and travel assistance services available? Yes No
 - Provider's vetting process for charter bus companies or other on-site vendors? Yes No
 - Which party—the school or the provider—is responsible for injuries, claims, or property damage arising out of the program? Yes No
 - Possible naming of the school as an additional insured on the provider's insurance policies? Yes No
 - Resolution process for disputes arising out of the program? Yes No

Selection and Preparation of Program Leaders

■ **Selecting Program Leaders.** Have you established a consistent process for evaluating and selecting study abroad program leaders and chaperones—whether employees or volunteers (including parents of students)—that reviews:

- Prior experience with or knowledge of the program location? Yes No
- Relevant foreign language ability? Yes No
- Background check results? Yes No
- Training in applicable health emergency procedures such as CPR or the administration of allergic response treatments, such as the EpiPen? Yes No
- General temperament and suitability for a leadership role? Yes No

Actions Needed

■ *Campus Communications and Contacts.* During pre-departure orientation, does your school review with program leaders any relevant safety manuals and/or crisis management plans and identify individuals at the school to contact in the event of:

-
▫ Death or injury to a student? Yes No
-
▫ Natural disasters, such as earthquakes or tsunamis? Yes No
-
▫ Serious student misconduct? Yes No
-
▫ Harassment, assault, or other misconduct by another program leader on the trip? Yes No
-
▫ Arrests or other violations of local law? Yes No
-
▫ Property damage caused by someone on the trip? Yes No

■ *Dealing With Students in Emergencies.* Do you train program leaders on appropriate actions in emergencies, such as:

-
▫ Completing an accident or incident report in the event of a student's illness or injury? Yes No
-
▫ The preferred way to reach a student's parent or other emergency contact? Yes No
-
▫ Advising students what to do if program leaders are incapacitated during the trip? Yes No
-
▫ How to handle the remainder of the group after an emergency involving one student? Yes No
-
▫ How to enlist additional support if necessary, including school staff that can travel to the trip location to provide assistance in a crisis? Yes No

■ *Insurance.* Do you brief program leaders on the insurance available to them and program participants overseas, including:

-
▫ Whether health insurance applies during travel abroad? Yes No
-
▫ Whether supplemental insurance is available for items such as trip cancellation, property damage, psychological counseling, medical assistance, emergency evacuation, and repatriation of remains? Yes No

Student Selection and Pre-Departure Orientation

■ As part of your screening process for student applicants, do you collect information about:

-
▫ The applicant's relevant language ability? Yes No
-
▫ Prior course work or life experience that prepares the applicant to participate? Yes No

Actions Needed

▫ References with personal knowledge of the applicant's maturity and readiness to study abroad? Yes No

▫ Previous academic dishonesty or other discipline issues that may bear on the applicant's fitness to participate? Yes No

▫ Any food or other allergies that may pose a particular problem for travelers to the program location? Yes No

■ With respect to applicants who may be disabled or have health conditions that require treatment during a program:

▫ Are program leaders advised that applicants and their parents should not be asked about students' disabilities and that participation may not be denied solely on the basis of any disabilities? Yes No

▫ Are applicants and their parents provided information about potential accessibility issues in the program location? Yes No

▫ Once students are accepted, do you inquire about any special needs that might affect their full participation? Yes No

▫ If a student or parent identifies the student as disabled and indicates accommodations may be needed, do you consult legal counsel and engage the student and parent in an interactive process to determine what accommodations may be necessary and whether they are feasible? Yes No

▫ Do you have program leaders participate in the interactive process so that they are aware of students' particular needs and any agreed-upon accommodations? Yes No

▫ Do you provide a written explanation to students, parents, and program leaders about the school's policy on distributing prescription or over-the-counter medications to participants while abroad? Yes No

Pre-Departure Orientation

■ Do you require student applicants to attend an orientation before the departure of any program? Yes No

■ Do you invite parents to attend the orientation? Yes No

■ Do you require parents to attend? Yes No

■ If parents are unable to attend in person, do you offer alternatives, such as Skype or conference call participation? Yes No

■ Are the following topics covered in pre-departure orientation:

▫ General risks of overseas travel? Yes No

▫ Risks specific to the trip location? Yes No

▫ Required or recommendation vaccinations? Yes No

Actions Needed

- Health care while abroad, including insurance coverage? Yes No
- The applicability of the school's handbook and student conduct code overseas? Yes No
- Procedures in the event of a serious disciplinary infraction during the program? Yes No
- Crisis response procedures, including whom to contact if the alleged perpetrator of harassment or assault is a program leader on the trip? Yes No
- The school's policy regarding student cellphone possession and use during the trip? Yes No

Waivers, Assumptions of Risk, and Related Documents

■ Before program departure, do you require:

- The parents of student participants to execute a waiver of liability that releases the parents' own claims of negligence against the school? Yes No
- Any student participants who are not minors to execute a waiver of liability releasing their claims? Yes No
- Both the participants and their parents to:
 - Acknowledge in writing that they have read the school's handbook and any other school conduct rules, and understand that these rules apply overseas? Yes No
 - Provide emergency contact information? Yes No
- Student participants to sign an assumption of risk form that:
 - Identifies as specifically as possible the potential risks of the trip? Yes No
 - States that the student understands those risks and is taking them voluntarily? Yes No
- The student participants and their parents to execute and, if necessary, notarize any documents that apply to the particular trip, such as permission to travel or medical treatment authorization forms? Yes No

2 Oversight During the Program

School administrators should establish written policies governing oversight of study abroad programs. In addition to requiring some level of on-site orientation for participants, such policies might cover key risks commonly associated with international study.

On-Site Student Orientation

■ After reaching the program site, do you require program leaders to address the following topics, as appropriate for the location:

-
▫ Information about your school's crisis management plan and a list of emergency contacts at the school? Yes No
-
▫ Contact information for local authorities? Yes No
-
▫ Local cultural practices and beliefs? Yes No
-
▫ Particular risks of criminal activity? Yes No
-
▫ Specific health risks, such as communicable diseases? Yes No
-
▫ Risks posed by the political climate, including war, civil unrest, or terrorism? Yes No
-
▫ Responses to possible natural disasters, such as earthquakes or tsunamis? Yes No
-
▫ Any other risks unique to the program location? Yes No
-
▫ A daily review of any risks that participants are likely to face during that day's activities? Yes No

Managing Key Risks

■ *Accidental Death or Injury.* To reduce the risk of liability for a student's death or injury during the program, do you:

-
▫ Ensure that all written marketing and program materials provided to students and parents clearly identify which activities the school sponsors and state that any others will be undertaken independently? Yes No
-
▫ Restrict school-sponsored activities to those integral to the program's academic goals? Yes No
-
▫ Prohibit inherently dangerous activities, such as cliff climbing or bungee jumping? Yes No
-
▫ Prohibit program leaders from promoting or participating in nonsponsored activities? Yes No

■ *Motor Vehicle Accidents.* To reduce the risk of liability for motor vehicle accidents during a program, does your school:

-
▫ Vet charter bus/transportation providers or maintain a list of quality providers to use for sponsored activities? Yes No
-
▫ Revise any campus vehicle usage policies to apply on study abroad programs? Yes No
-
▫ Encourage program leaders to use public transportation or vetted transportation companies, even if leaders are allowed to drive during the program? Yes No

Actions Needed

Actions Needed

■ **Assault.** With respect to allegations of assault, including sexual assault, by or against anyone involved in a study abroad program, do you:

- Require program leaders who learn of an alleged assault to promptly report it to designated school administrators? Yes No
- Ensure that designated administrators are prepared to provide immediate guidance to on-site program leaders regarding:
 - Obtaining medical attention for the victim? Yes No
 - Reporting the assault to local authorities? Yes No
 - Advising other program participants of the reported assault and necessary details, such as the location and general circumstances? Yes No
 - Taking appropriate action if the alleged perpetrator is a program leader or participant on the trip? Yes No

■ **Discrimination and Harassment.** Because some court decisions indicate that U.S. laws against discrimination and harassment protect students on study abroad programs, schools and legal counsel should review and revise internal policies prohibiting such conduct for application abroad. Once this task is accomplished, does your school:

- Train program leaders and students during orientation on the policies, including:
 - Policy definitions of discrimination and harassment? Yes No
 - How to report policy violations? Yes No
- Require program leaders to report promptly any violations to the school? Yes No
- Provide trip participants with an alternate contact person at the school, in case the alleged perpetrator is a program leader on the trip? Yes No

■ **General Violations of School Policies.** All materials for study abroad programs should state that student handbooks and codes of conduct apply to overseas study just as they do on the school's home campus. In addition, do you:

- Train program leaders to promptly notify the school if a participant is involved in a violation of any academic, disciplinary, or program-specific rules, such as underage alcohol use? Yes No
- Require program leaders to document the alleged violation? Yes No
- Ensure that school procedures for investigation and discipline are followed after a violation overseas is reported? Yes No

3 Evaluation After the Program

Schools should solicit feedback from study abroad program participants and parents, as well as program leaders. Post-program evaluations can be useful to schools when evaluating their global studies program and determining whether the same or a similar program should be approved in the future.

Student and Parent Evaluations

■ Do you request that student participants or their parents complete a post-trip survey covering such items as:

-
▫ How well the orientation prepared the student for the location, such as differences in culture, language, and customs? Yes No
-
▫ How prepared the program leaders were? Yes No
-
▫ Whether students experienced any health or safety problems? Yes No
-
▫ Their overall impressions of the program, both positive and negative? Yes No

Program Leader Reports

■ Do you require program leaders to complete a written post-trip report covering such matters as:

-
▫ The effectiveness of pre-trip planning/orientation? Yes No
-
▫ Ratings of services provided by vendors and contractors? Yes No
-
▫ Whether they encountered any particular problems? Yes No
-
▫ Information about the location that should be considered for future trips? Yes No

Acknowledgement

This checklist, “Managing Study Abroad Programs in Independent Schools” was written by Hillary L. Pettegrew, JD, risk counsel for UE.

Actions Needed



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