



STANDARDS - GAP YEAR COUNSELORS

Instructions:

The GYA Application is best used by studying each Indicator in this .pdf document as a self-evaluation to determine whether you are ready to apply officially for Accredited or Associate Gap Year Counselor Member status. The “In Place” column should be used for areas that evidence already exists and can easily be provided. The “In Process” column should be used when proof needs to be developed; this may mean that a policy needs to be written and embedded, or simply that you are not sure whether the proof exists. The “Not Applicable” column should be used when you, as a counselor, do not employ any of the particulars that that specific Indicator refers to. Finally, the “Exception Requested” column should be used when you feel you have responsibly considered the Indicator and addressed it in an alternative fashion. In cases of an exception, additional support documentation must be submitted such as a brief explanation or an alternative to the proposed evidence.

Fee structure:

There is no separate application fee. Counselors must re-apply every four (4) years. Membership dues are paid every year. Note, significant changes to Executive Structure or ownership will automatically trigger an accreditation review.

- \$300 per year / organization, + \$100 / counselor within the same organization. All individuals must apply separately although the same application materials, if shared, can be used across applications.

Annual fees are due each year regardless of whether it is an evaluation year or not.

- *Needs-based discounts are available upon request.*
- *Gap Year Counselors must each submit for their own accreditation, note the discounted fee structure for multiple counselors in one group. Applications from the same group may use and reference the same materials, however, we must have a signature on the [Engagement Letter](#) from each applicant.*
- *Note, an Associate GYA Gap Year Counselor Badge is forthcoming.*



Indicator
1.1.1 - Experiential Learning by: appropriate mentorship . (<i>Mentorship supports student safety and learning - each placement will have different requirements appropriate to that circumstance.</i>)
1.1.2 - Experiential Learning by: focused reflection with a strong emphasis on student-directed answers. (<i>At the end of intentional experiences, equal intention must be put into debriefing and reflecting upon what happened so that learning is cemented. Journal prompts, curricula, or access to suggested resources all support reflection.</i>)
1.1.3 - Participants must actively be engaged in the search process. (<i>While many students can benefit from a gap year, mandatory participation in a program inevitably challenges outcomes. Parents or courts directing students towards specific programs should be discouraged.</i>)

Indicator
1.2.1 - Participants of diverse backgrounds are considered (eg., politics, socio-economic background, different abilities, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity). (<i>An environment that fosters respect, tolerance and recognizes the overwhelming contribution of diversity is an essential component of gap year education. Where appropriate, special consideration for safety (eg, LGBTQ in Uganda), should be discussed in educational terms as a concern, but not prohibited for student participation.</i>)
1.2.2 - Support access (financial aid opportunities) for clients with publicly available methods of supporting lower-income students. (<i>The statements should recognize the current accomplishments of the Gap Year Counselor and focus on the underlying benefits of a more inclusive approach.</i>)
1.2.3 - Gap Year Counselor does not accept commissions from any gap year programs. (<i>Clearly, fit is paramount in a successful gap year and when money becomes part of a reward system it easily can confuse motives.</i>)

Indicator
1.2.4 - Understand Essential Eligibility Criteria (EEC). (<i>EEC are vital to clearly identify what is needed for each student to physically and safely complete the established itinerary, but also protect the Gap Year Counselor from potential ADA lawsuits.</i>)
1.2.5 - Be clear about finances: including consulting costs, anticipated additional charges, and clear refund policy. (<i>Finances hit at the heart of establishing trust and no one wants to feel blind-sided. This means clear anticipated costs. Refund policies must be clearly stated to ensure financial accountability.</i>)
1.2.6 - "Safe," "always," "guarantee" are not used. (<i>It benefits no one to use language that creates an expectation about things that are ultimately out of the Counselor's control. Everyone benefits from accurately representing risks as well as clarifying that sometimes bad things happen despite the best preparation.</i>)

Indicator
1.3.1 - Counselor should be registered and have proper insurance. <i>(Having sufficient insurance, being properly registered, and handling the business of your company responsibly is a protection to all gap year students, not the least of which includes the company itself.)</i>
1.3.2 - Research and assess placement partner and history, with an eye towards safety and student experience. <i>(When partnering with an organization assumptions should never be made that they are competent simply because they have a nice website.)</i>
1.3.3 - Prior to departure, dialogue and documents assess and prepare student for any medication, physical health, and/or mental health concerns. <i>(In order to best protect each student, the Gap Year Counselor must know any particular student needs in advance. Preparation and information are a minimum for responsible care.)</i>
1.3.4 - Encourage student get basic first-aid certification, or better. <i>(In every case, students will evolve to become their own resource and basic first-aid certification will improve awareness and confidence towards a better net experience.)</i>

Indicator
1.3.5 - Resources must include access to a clinician, available on-call, for psychological issues and to help assess fitness of students in the field. <i>(Psychological issues are the second most common issue faced by students while studying abroad. It is through informed experts that families are able to make accurate assessments and such specific skills must not be left for a family to research while in a crisis. In some cases organizational partners will have these resources, whereas in others, the Counselor may have a list of resources available for families in a pinch.)</i>
1.3.6 - Private information about specific students (to parents, outsiders, or others) without either the express permission of the student, or to prevent a clear and timely danger to a person or persons (ie, FERPA & HIPAA). <i>(Sharing any students' information creates many consequences and should only be done with their prior permission, or if a clear and immediate danger is posed. This explicitly includes information-sharing with parents. Minor children don't have the same legal right to privacy, however, every effort should be made to treat them as adults whenever safety is not a concern.)</i>
1.3.7 - Facilitate re-entry/transference process. <i>(These experiences inevitably will transform a student's life, but even more-so with proper context about the experience. Taking time to prepare a student for 'normal' life, or 'reverse culture shock' are critical towards their longterm success and the integration of lessons learned.)</i>

Indicator

1.3.8 - Written pre-departure information focused on safety, that includes the following details. *(Different people learn in different ways. While it's important to address details over the phone and 'on the ground', it's also vital to have these same details available for reference in print.)*

- Program policies, Housing, Food and drink, Local environmental concerns, Transportation systems & safety, Vaccinations (based on CDC guidelines), Possible challenges (eg personal, roup, cultural), Regional & local security, Visa & passport information, Name/contact information for local supervisor, Packing list.

1.3.9 - On-site orientation, that includes at least the following: *(Orientations are critical to preparing students for both a successful and safe experience. The local staff must be able to provide either independently or in concert with organization staff, all life-safety details.)*

- Medical emergencies, including medical kits and nearest hospitals,
- Safe transportation practices,
- Local security concerns (political, crime, environmental, etc.),
- Re-establishes any program policies or expectations,
- Addresses local concerns for disease, cross cultural interactions & norms, and how to/whom to contact in an emergency.

Indicator

1.4.1 - Regular check-ins (minimally every 4 weeks) between the student and Gap Year Counselor's office, or, minimally with the designated local contact. *(Students working independently often will not reach out for help unless prompted and part of an existing relationship. Conversations and check ins should focus on mental health, physical health, safety, and quality of experience.)*

1.4.2 - Share reviews of placements to ground expectations. *(Having great information is important, but only if it gets to those in the position to make a decision. Students must be informed about what to expect for their own success, but also as a matter of transparency and liability. Some considerations must be made for appropriateness too as not all students are capable of an independent experience.)*

1.4.3 - Share all relevant commitments and details arranged on the students' behalf. *(Students necessarily are their own best advocates on independent placements. However, having the information to advocate for themselves is of course required.)*

- Financial arrangements
- Responsibility for meals and accommodation
- Expectations for the student

Indicator

2.1.1 - If service-learning takes place, the Gap Year Counselor provides resources for the student about responsible service ethics. *(If service-learning takes place, then the student must be made aware and prepared for all relevant and reasonably anticipated concerns.)*

2.1.2 - Gap Year Counselor has a clear and publicly available policy about their ethical guidelines relevant to service placements, and specific to each of the following: *(Whether a minimum service-commitment, a requirement for specific certifications, or including links to relevant articles, gap year students rely on experts to know what appropriate service looks like longitudinally, especially.)*

- Vulnerable Populations (e.g., HIV-affected, orphans, Internally Displaced Persons, "poverty tourism," etc.)
- Medical (e.g., appropriate medical-training)
- Wildlife (e.g., trophy tourism)

Indicator

3.1.1 - Gap Year Counselor facilitates registration with US State Department STEP program for all US Citizens traveling internationally. *(If traveling internationally, all appropriate resources should be notified to help address any emergencies that might arise and to keep staff informed.)*

3.1.2 - Gap Year Counselor is enrolled in the Overseas Security Advisory Council. *(US Organizations operating internationally have free access to everything below "Secret" classification through the OSAC, which is run by Diplomatic Security Services of the US Department of State. Access to these information can help respond, triage, or plan for dynamic security concerns.)*

3.1.3 - Gap Year Counselor facilitates information and resources specifically about medical insurance, and evacuation insurance for all students traveling internationally. *(Having great medical and evacuation insurance is critical, however most Americans simply do not know what to look for, or more commonly, don't understand what existing insurance will cover while on a gap year program. Reputable carriers might include iNext, International SOS, HTH international, or MEDEX, to name a few.)*