

Fair Trade Learning: Definition and Origin

Originating from the [Community Based Global Learning Collaborative](#), **Fair Trade Learning** is a global educational partnership exchange that prioritizes reciprocity in relationships through cooperative, cross-cultural participation in learning, service, and civil society efforts. It foregrounds the goals of economic equity, equal partnership, mutual learning, cooperative and positive social change, transparency, and sustainability. Fair Trade Learning explicitly engages the global civil society role of educational exchange in **fostering a more just, equitable, and sustainable world** (Hartman, Morris Paris, & Blache-Cohen, 2013).”

Applications and Adaptations of Fair Trade Learning

The Gap Year Association (GYA) adapts the Fair Trade Learning (FTL) principles to gap year education in the [GYA Official Standards of Accreditation](#). The Forum on Education Abroad adopts FTL for their [Guidelines for Community Engaged Learning Experiences Abroad](#) for global higher education. Additionally, several colleges, universities, and global education providers use FTL principles as guideposts in their community-based organizational partnerships.

The Gap Year Association’s Fair Trade Learning Committee

The Gap Year Association (GYA)’s Fair Trade Learning Committee is run in partnership between GYA and the Community Based Global Learning Collaborative. For more information about this committee and its work, visit the [GYA FTL Committee webpage](#).

Mission: To create resources for organizations to use to improve their global/domestic partnerships by applying [Fair Trade Learning](#) principles.

Note from Committee Members: Fair Trade Learning (FTL) goes beyond the simplistic phrasing commonly used in service-learning and community engagement rhetoric, such as ‘including the locals’ or using the word ‘ethical’ to market a program. FTL principles guide organizations to deepen the reciprocity and equitability in their global partnerships in tangible ways. FTL principles uphold the notion that **individuals and communities, regardless of global origin, have the fundamental right to determine their own challenges and maintain agency over self-determined solutions to those challenges.**

FTL is intended as a tool to:

- Promote reciprocity and power-sharing in intercultural relationships at interpersonal and inter-organizational levels
- Enhance economic transparency
- Improve planning and clarify goals for partnerships
- Protect vulnerable populations
- Ensure that community agency is at the center of community-based learning* partnerships

Suggested Audiences for this Guide:

- Gap year program providers
- Global education providers independent of (or connected to, depending on the context), higher education institutions
- Traveling groups planning on engaging in any service learning or community-based learning activities where there may be a gap of culture and power

Guiding Questions for Program Providers

The following questions intend to guide you as a Program Provider in using the Fair Trade Learning (FTL) principles to improve relationships with your global community-based organizational partners. Each of the following principle titles comes from the Gap Year Association (GYA)'s adaptation of FTL in the GYA Standards of Accreditation, which the GYA Standards and Accreditation Committee ratified in July 2022. View GYA's definitions for each of the principles in 2.X.X of the [GYA 2023 Standards of Accreditation](#) to further understand how the questions relate to each of the principles.

Fair Trade Learning Principles at a Glance:

[Guiding Questions for Program Providers](#)

[1. Common Purposes for Partnership](#)

[2. Partner Community Program Leadership](#)

[3. Rights of the most vulnerable](#)

[4. Partner Community Program Participation](#)

[5. Community Theory of Change](#)

[6. Ethics in Recruitment & Publications](#)

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[8. Student Orientation to Community Partner](#)

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[11. Financial Transparency](#)

[12. Regular Evaluation of Programs and Partnership](#)

[13. Ethical Engagement with Animals](#)

1. Common Purposes for Partnership

- a. Do you communicate with your community based organization (CBO) partners about mutual goals and objectives for the partnership and any shared projects?
- b. Are there processes in place to identify when changes or evolutions in any goals occur and how these may influence the role of gap year students in any ongoing projects?
- c. Do you have an agreement in place that defines the goals of the partnership, including the identified benefits that each party gains from the partnership? Is the agreement reviewed on a regular basis?
- d. Does your program ask each student about their skillsets during the enrollment process? Does the program provider share these identified skills with the CBO partner? And together, do they determine how or if these skills might be best utilized for a genuinely meaningful impact within the CBO's community?
- e. If the program sends students on independent experiences (i.e. community engagement outside of a cohort) and a program participant's skills don't match a given CBO's needs, does the program provider refer the student to engage with a different CBO?

2. Partner Community Program Leadership

- a. Are projects led and/or directed by local community members with a stake in your program's activities?
- b. Are local community members paid to do so when co-leading or co-teaching part of the program activities?
- c. Do people native to or with long-term lived experience in the partner community have leadership roles in your program? This could look like hiring locals as field leaders (or even administrative staff) for the program; alternatively, this could look like hiring locals to lead lessons on topics with which they may have academic or professional expertise, or lived experience.
- d. Are members of the partner community invited to share with program students, as co-educators, information which they feel is important?

3. Rights of the most vulnerable

- a. Has your organization and your community-based organizational partner(s) worked together to identify any vulnerable populations impacted by or involved in the program activities?
- b. Are there policies in place addressing the rights and wellbeing of each identified vulnerable population associated with the program?
- c. Do you have any training or education for staff and students to ensure that they understand how historical structures and systems of oppression affect vulnerable populations?
- d. Is the provider able to implement any policies that set out to protect vulnerable populations (i.e. a way to transparently communicate with partner organizations about the impact of short-term student groups on the population in question; ethical photography; empowering storytelling)?
- e. Do you comply with the philosophy that, with regards to vulnerable groups, gap year program provider policies should consider common practices in host community environments wherever possible? For example:

Consider a community-based organization (CBO) working with students with disabilities that has strict policies around conducting background checks on each gap year student. In this case, would you as a program provider comply with this and require any gap year student who hasn't conducted the background check to opt out of working/volunteering with the CBO's clients in solidarity with the CBO?

- f. Does your organization ensure that students do not work outside of their skillsets for activities they're unqualified to engage in within their home countries (e.g. medical or veterinary volunteering, translation in official settings, engineering projects that could fall on the locals after the student leave, etc.)?
- g. Does your organization have a process in place to enable reporting and evaluation of concerns regarding vulnerable populations?
 - i. To whom does the program report these incidents? Does the provider know the proper channels of communication for specific incidents (e.g. [Think Child Safe](#) in Cambodia for trafficking concerns)?

The local authorities (military or police) are not always the best point of contact for reporting incidents or concerns such as human trafficking in each country. Some locations' military or police might have corrupt practices. While this won't be the case everywhere, it's important to develop an understanding (e.g. through

in-country partners or sources aligned with the provider's mission, or through the UN's resources) of whom to approach and when before sending students into the field.

Recommended Reading: Research on Orphanage Volunteering

1. [The Orphanage Voluntourism Campaign: Is the End-Game in Sight?](#) by [Martin Punaks](#)

International development and child protection expert Martin Punaks writes about the major issues with orphanage volunteering and suggests ways for organizations and students to do better and avoid harming children. Punaks includes hyperlinks to several sources of research in this article.

2. Guiney, T., & Mostafanezhad, M. (2015). [The political economy of orphanage tourism in Cambodia](#). *Tourist Studies*, 15(2), 132-155.
3. [The Paradox of Orphanage Volunteering](#), Martin Punaks and Katie Feit, [Next Generation Nepal](#)

Additional resources on orphanage volunteering from [Rethink Orphanages](#)

- [Facts and figures on orphanage volunteering](#)
- [Individual Orphanage Volunteering](#): fact sheet
- [The Love You Give](#): documentary on orphanage volunteering
- [The Problem with Orphanage Volunteering](#)

4. Partner Community Program Participation

- a. Are community member peers of the gap year students included in program activities to learn and/or participate where possible?
- b. Are members of the community provided with scholarships to participate in one of your organization's programs?

5. Community Theory of Change

- a. As a program provider do you know, understand and prioritize the goals of the community based organizations you partner with?
- b. Are project/ project work/activities identified by the community in line with community needs and goals?

- c. Does the provider work within the scope of the community-based organization partners' own goals for their organization and community?
- d. Are host-community constituents in charge of their own solutions to their own self-determined challenges as opposed to a program provider assessing problems and solutions from the outside?
- e. Are community leaders/stakeholders confident in the designated community partners' ability to represent the needs of the community?

6. Ethics in Recruitment & Publications

[GYA photo ethics link](#)

- a. Do you have an image policy that looks to address the following for images used in marketing materials:
 - i. Consensual image use (i.e. photo subjects have given permission to the program provider or program student to use/post their image).
 - ii. Avoiding representation of 'saviourism,' dependency-based narratives, or poverty stereotypes
 - iii. Representation of locals as leaders
 - iv. Ethical practice in project work (especially in health, child and animal welfare)
 - v. Representation of diversity of program students and the locals (e.g. people from different racial and socio-economic backgrounds as well as different physical abilities) to show solidarity over saviorism
- b. Does the program have a student orientation related to social media posts and how to ethically represent the people they meet and the cultures in which they're immersed?
- c. Does the program orient students to possible local culture around photo-taking? E.g. in a few cultures, some people feel that having their photo taken is like having their soul taken.
 - i. How does it make the other person feel to have their picture taken? Are students trained to ask first and to explain how the image will be used? Coercion into having a photo taken is not the same as permission to take and post the photo.

7. Communication Between Program & Community Partner Organizations

- a. Does the program provider have processes in place to receive feedback from the CBOs about students during and after their program?

- b. Does the program provider gather and disseminate feedback from the gap year students about their experiences with the CBO?
- c. Is there a regular, clearly defined process by which CBOs provide critical feedback about the partnership?
- d. Does the program provider have a process to address the CBO's feedback?
- e. Is the CBO able to give feedback to the program provider without the CBO having to fear jeopardizing the relationship?

8. Student Orientation to Community Partner

- a. Does the program provider have a formal orientation in place at the beginning of a project to ensure that students are culturally aware and able to behave appropriately (including historical, political, geographic, economic and other background contexts as well as the strengths and assets that the community already possesses)?
- b. Does the program provider educate the students on the work and context of the CBO and projects/activities?
- c. Does the program provider have a process in place to enable discussion and reflection of experiences before, during, and at the end of the program, to ensure ongoing cultural understanding?
- d. Does the program provider set student expectations on observing and learning about issues by shadowing or working alongside locals?
- e. Does the program provider guide program students in intentional reflection regarding ethics and critical self-reflection (reflecting on their biases, identities, place within global structures of inequity, and saviorism complexes)?
*Some resources for developing guided critical self-reflection include: [Learning Service](#), [Critical Global Citizenship education](#), and the [Interdependence and Civic Action](#) toolkit
- f. Does the program provider help participants with marginalized identities reflect on these and prepare them for life in the partner community (ie race, ethnicity, LGBTQ, gender, etc)? GYA's DEIA Committee has developed resources on this topic, which you can find [here](#).

9. Environmental Impact

- a. Have the program activities been evaluated by the program provider and CBO for activity impact on the local environment, including the following?
 - i. Use of resources
 - ii. Disposal of waste
 - iii. Specific activities to improve the environment
 - iv. Unintended environmental impacts - and how these can be mitigated.
- b. Does the program provider consider animals and the environment when planning program activities? (See category 13. Ethical Engagement with Animals for deeper discussion on this topic).

10. Economic Considerations and Local Sourcing

- a. How does your program ensure financial benefit to the local community? For example, contracting with local vs international/franchise for program elements such as:
 - i. *Housing & Accommodation* (i.e. homestay, dorm, locally-owned hostel, camping, etc)
 - ii. *Meals* (i.e. meals included in an orientation)
 - iii. *Activities/Programming* (ie tour companies and guides)
 - iv. *Transportation*
 - v. *Personal purchases* (ie souvenirs, artisan items)
 - vi. *Suggestions for independent options for the above items?* (ie a handout with local restaurants, accommodation, artesian shops, tour companies)
 - vii. *If you are intentionally not contracting with local organizations, do you explain why to program students?*
 - viii. *Does the community partner help guide choices regarding the above program elements?*
 - ix. *What else applies to your program?*
- b. Is there a supervisor or coordinator in place to support students that does not decrease the capacity of the organization to do their work?
- c. Does the work carried out by students take away a job from a local person?
- d. Is there an open dialogue with the community partner to discuss the economic impact of the students attending a program? (E.g. Is there a basis for how much community-based organizations are paid out?).

11. Financial Transparency

- a. Is there a clear transparent breakdown of fees available for both program students and the community partner? Is this done in a culturally sensitive way?

12. Regular Evaluation of Programs and Partnership

- a. Do you have regular feedback and review processes in place to evaluate the ongoing success of the partnership from both yours and your CBO's perspectives?
 - i. Refer to FTL Principle on Common Purposes. Are all parties able to re-evaluate their common purposes for partnership on an ongoing basis?
- b. Who gives feedback to whom and when?
- c. Ongoing evaluation of what success to the program means to all parties and how it's measured (sustainable, safe, beneficial to stakeholders, etc)ives
 - i. Does the program provider and CBO discuss safety and risk management applicable to multiple community stakeholders and program/CBO students and staff?
 - ii. How does each stakeholder view and manage risk and is this part of the regular evaluation process?
- d. Is there a process for terminating a collaboration on fair and equitable terms? Sometimes, where context warrants, a successful partnership can be short term, or set to operate on a set timeline. Indefinite collaboration is not the goal, unless it strategically makes sense to multiple stakeholders.
 - i. E.g. the case where a community-based organization no longer needs students, or the program provider goes out of business.
 - ii. E.g. One or more stakeholders has strong reason to terminate the collaboration

13. Ethical Engagement with Animals

- a. Have you reviewed the [Five Agreed Upon Freedoms](#) for Animals in Captivity, and glossary for animal engagement (sanctuary, refuge, rehabilitation center)?
- b. Do projects working with animals have long-term goals for its animals (both in care and future animals, including rehabilitation goals for wounded or captured/confiscated animals)
- c. Does the CBO working with animals have an ethical euthanasia policy?
- d. Do your projects that work with animals have an animal welfare policy? Was this policy developed by veterinarians and behaviorists?
- e. Is contact with wild animals limited only to necessary interaction?

- f. Do you ensure animal projects do not engage with, and actively work against the practices of [canned hunting](#) and [wild animals as entertainers](#)?
- g. Is there a thorough risk assessment in place for students and animals? This can include risk to staff.
- h. Potentially problematic activities, such as students cleaning out wildlife cages, or risk/endangerment to Animals (both the physical but mental safety of all animals).

Important note: there is no agreed-upon definition for the term ‘animal sanctuary.’ Anyone can use the term with no expectations for best practices around the term. Thus, the onus for vetting community-based partner organizations’ practices in this context lies with the gap year program. For a list of organizations committed to ethical practices with animals, look into the [Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries](#) (GFSA) and the [Pan African Sanctuary Alliance](#) (PASA). GFAS and PASA both advocate for animal rights and ethical engagement with animals on larger scales by setting standards for best practices.

- Visiting animal sanctuaries that breed animals into captivity. Since there is no agreed up definition of an ethical sanctuary, explaining that this term is hazy is a good idea
- Animal sanctuaries or reserves that support, promote, or allow canned hunting (usually lions)
- Animal sanctuaries that allow or promote inappropriate handling of wild animals (eg cuddling a tiger cub; swimming with dolphins in a contained area)
- Tourist locations that drug wild animals for the sole purpose of tourist interaction (e.g. [Tiger Temple](#))
- Participating in feel-good data collection of no conservation value. Or programs that are not led by scientists and researchers.
- Visiting or partnering in unethical sanctuaries that house animals in unsafe/unsanitary conditions, and in conditions in which animal habitats are small or cruelly unnatural compared to animal’s natural habitat
- Sanctuaries that purchase animals from illegal markets and/or don’t employ staff with the professional knowledge of how to care for animals correctly
- Attractions or “sanctuaries” where animals perform tricks

A Special Thank You from the GYA Fair Trade Learning Committee

Thank you for reading and using this guide. The fact that your organization is using it indicates your commitment to increasing the reciprocity, equitability, and ethical responsibility in your global and domestic community-based organizational partnerships. We welcome feedback on this guide and suggestions for additional resources that GYA’s FTL Committee might create; please submit feedback to FTL@gapyearassociation.org.

If your organization aligns with best practices in community-based learning (including service-learning) ethics, we encourage you to apply for [Gap Year Association Accreditation](#). GYA Accreditation offers the opportunity to show that your organization meets the highest standards in the field. Additionally, it opens the door for your organization to offer college credit to your students through GYA's partnership with Portland State University.

The Program Providers Guide to Fair Trade Learning was especially informed and developed by GYA FTL Committee Members Caitlin Ferrarini, Elizabeth Bezark, Marion Taylor, Dominique Robinson, Josephine Foster, Heilwig Jones, Warren Oliver, Kyle Anderson, Nora Livingstone, Patrick Eccles, and Faith Valencia-Forrester.