This guide is geared toward students and individual travelers who want to engage ethically with global and domestic communities, and to critically reflect on their impact within those communities.

We use Fair Trade Learning as the framework for the critical reflection questions that we invite you to consider with this guide.

Photo: Global Citizen Year

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 (Hartman, Morris Paris, & Blache-Cohen, 2013)

Gap Year: A semester or year of experiential learning, typically taken after high school and prior to career or post-secondary education, in order to deepen one's practical, professional, and personal awareness. This can happen through travel, community-based learning (formerly called service learning or volunteering), and/or internships. Anyone of any age can take a gap year! Most gap year students who travel with gap year program providers tend to be between the ages of 17 and 22; however, anyone can benefit from taking intentional time between life chapters (e.g high school and college, college and career, mid-career sabbatical, etc.).

This Guide to Fair Trade Learning relates specifically to ethical engagement with global and domestic communities. For more information on planning a gap year more generally, download GYA's Gap Year Planning Guide.

Gap Year Program: A semester or year-long experiential education course designed for groups (i.e. cohorts) of typically 8-16 gap year students. Gap year programs might include a combination of travel, outdoor education, adventure, intercultural & language learning, community based activities (i.e. service-learning), vocational education, post-therapeutic transitions, self awareness education, and/or curricular themes.

Suggested Audiences for this Guide:

- Gap year students and independent travelers

Guiding Questions for Students or Individual Travelers

The following questions intend to guide you in choosing the most ethical and equitable community-based learning opportunities, while taking an independent gap year and/or while traveling with a cohort.

It is important for each individual to be aware of their identity and positionality within global and domestic systems of power and oppression.

When engaging with global communities, especially across gaps of culture and power, it's best to learn first, and to only perform tasks aligned with your skillsets. Positive intentions do not guarantee positive outcomes.

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.

1. **Purpose for the Experience/Immersive Activity**
   The gap year student(s) and community-based organization(s) have mutually-agreed upon goals for all projects and activities.

Ask Program Providers	Ask Yourself Before/While Gapping Independently
- Why does your organization engage in community-based learning and service learning? - Does your organization have mutually-agreed upon purposes for your global (and domestic) community-based partnerships? - How do the missions of your organization's community-based partners align with your mission or course themes?	- What are my goals and intentions for this experience? - In what ways have I critically reflected on my identity, privilege, and intentions for volunteering? - Am I willing to learn and observe first and foremost while engaging in global communities? - Am I willing to recognize that my help or service may not be needed or wanted in a given context? - If my skills aren't needed in a particular community or organization, am I willing to exercise humility and choose a different experience?

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	- Why is the issue that the NGO or community-based organization addresses important to you? - Why do you want to engage with this project or organization? - Will you engage with this issue (e.g. public health, women's empowerment, sustainability,etc) after your gap year? If so, how? If not, revisit the above questions. - What is my mental health history (e.g. anxiety, depression, impact from past experiences, etc), and - Emotional and mental health challenges are a common part of an experience where we grow and learn. What challenges do I anticipate encountering while I travel? What resources can support me during these challenges? - Have I navigated mental health challenges in different cultural settings (this can be in one's home country as well)? - Am I willing to navigate unanticipated situations and own my own experience of it? - Am I a confident traveler? If not, will my presence cost a small community-based organization an extra expense of resources? Some community-based organizations offer service learning programs that include room and board, but research this!

2. Partner Community Program Leadership

Gap year students ask themselves whether or not local community members receive value from the presence of volunteers; gap year students should listen to the voices, questions, insights, concerns, and leadership of individuals in the local community.

Ask Program Providers	Consider While Gapping Independently
- Who leads lessons, especially in global communities? - Are those native to or with extensive lived experience in the place of immersion the ones teaching the lessons about issues they	- From whom am I learning? - Whose perspectives have I been socialized to take seriously? - How can I learn to listen to people whose perspectives differ from mine?

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face?	● Are people adapting to the language I speak, or am I making concerted efforts to understand and communicate in the most common language of the communities in which I'm engaging? ○ Language learning ideas: flash cards, podcasts, films/TV shows

3. Rights of the Most Vulnerable

Principle definition: Gap year students should work within their skill sets and training levels when engaging with vulnerable populations. Examples of vulnerable populations may include, but are not limited to: at-risk children, survivors of violence, elders, and migrants/refugees.

Consider the health and safety of vulnerable populations in the context of global pandemics, local epidemics, and crisis situations. Click here for GYA's COVID-19 Guidelines. In general, avoid direct contact with at-risk populations on short-term programs, and prioritizes referrals to gap year programs that avoid such direct contact. This especially applies to orphanage volunteering as well as to medical and dental volunteering. Students *should not* work outside of their skillsets in these areas, especially on activities they're unqualified to engage in within their home countries. **The Association of American Medical Colleges and the American Dental Education Association both have statements suggesting that pre-dental and pre-med students should refrain from engaging in unqualified activities abroad.**

Ask Program Providers	Consider while Gapping Independently

● What steps does your organization take in order to ensure the rights of vulnerable populations in the communities in which you travel with students?
● What are your public health safety protocols, especially in light of global pandemics and homestays?
	● Am I keeping in mind vulnerable populations when/if choosing a homestay or learning service activity?
	    ○ What impact does a revolving door of volunteers have on school children?
	    ○ Am I qualified to treat patients in my own community? If not, am I willing to get the required qualifications or choose a different experience?
	● In the past, what impact has travel, tourism, and immersive engagement had on the communities with which I plan to engage?
	● Have I done prior COVID or health checks and made a plan to do my best not to spread viruses to those with whom I will interact?

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Recommended Readings 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. [Rethink Orphanages](#)
Click through the links on this page for facts, research, and further points of critical reflection.

3. [The Love You Give](#): documentary on orphanage volunteering

4. [History of Residential Schools in Canada](#)
Start with this link to begin learning about the history of colonialism and forced displacement of indigenous peoples in the US and Canada. **What connections can you see between patterns in this context and the issues surrounding orphanage volunteerism abroad?**

5. [The Paradox of Orphanage Volunteering](#), Martin Punaks and Katie Feit, [Next Generation Nepal](#)

4. Community-Based Organization Theory of Change

[Definition of Theory of Change](#)
FTL principle definition: Communities and individuals have the fundamental right to determine their own challenges and maintain agency over the solutions to those challenges. Provider understands partner community members' ideas and strategies for improving their own communities, and all projects in which the provider and its participants engage are aligned with community-determined needs.

Ask Program Providers	Consider while Gapping Independently
- Who determines which projects are done within your partner community/communities and why? - What relationship or familiarity do your admin and field staff have with the community they are determining projects for?	- When volunteering, what is the mission of the organization with which I will engage? - Why do I feel connected with this issue? - What is my personal mission statement, and/or statement of purpose for this particular activity? - What relationship or familiarity does that person have with the community they are determining projects for?

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5. Ethics in Photography and Storytelling

Principle definition: While taking photographs of others and while publishing content (blogs, social media, etc) about the people and places with which you engage, be mindful of context and strive to present materials that show locals as leaders and with agency. Anyone taking a photo should ask for consent to take and use the imagery. Avoid decontextualized poverty stereotypes and imagery depicting imbalances of power or saviorism imagery. See GYA's Photo Ethics Policy for examples.

Ask Program Providers	Consider while Gapping Independently
Ask programs directly, or keep the following in mind as you look at recruitment and social media materials that the program publishes. See Savior Barbie Instagram for satirical examples of red flags and what not to do. ● Observe the program provider's marketing and how they portray and present people and places with whom/which they engage on programs. ● What is your organization's photo taking philosophy while engaging with global communities?	See Savior Barbie Instagram for satirical examples of red flags and what not to do. ● Have I asked for informed consent to take and post photos? ● If the people in the photos I've taken were to post photos of me with the same exact captions, would I like how I was being portrayed? ● What biases do I carry about the people I'm photographing and how can I be mindful of these while choosing whom and what to photograph? ● Why am I taking this picture?

6. Orientation to Culture and Community-Based Organization(s)

Gap year students, in order to help contextualize planned activities, can research significant historical, political, geographic, economic, and/or cultural background of any communities in which they plan to engage.

Ask Program Providers	Consider while Gapping Independently
● Does your organization provide cultural orientations for your program locations? ● For any service-learning activities, does your organization (or community-based partner organizations) provide orientations to the projects and their contexts?	● What are my assumptions about the place(s) where I'll be traveling and the culture and people there? ● If a student my age from another country were to visit my home country to volunteer, what would I want them to know about the community in which I grew up? ● What stereotypes have I learned and internalized about the cultures and communities of the places where I plan to visit?

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7. **Environmental Impact**
   Consider the carbon footprint of gap year activities not limited to: flight and ground transportation emissions, administrative footprint, infrastructure, group size, and local sourcing of purchased products and foods. Research broader impacts of and invest ethically in carbon offsetting programs.

Ask Program Providers	Consider while Gapping Independently
- How does your organization approach carbon offsetting? - Does your organization think critically about greenwashing and carbon offsetting programs that may inadvertently contribute to neocolonialism? - Do your programs invest in local, on-the-ground economies for locally-sourced foods, needed items, etc.?	- What is my carbon footprint? - How can I use reusable items and create less waste? - What sustainable forms of transportation can I take (e.g. public transportation, bicycling, etc.)? - Where am I purchasing gear to use on my trip, and how far did the pieces of it travel to arrive where I bought it? Think of the impact of fabrics or plastic/metal components of a tent, for instance, and the carbon footprint of global shipping and packaging.

8. **Financial Considerations and Local Sourcing**
   Students make concerted efforts to understand where their tuition and/or volunteer fees are going and why, and to use local sourcing for housing, food, travel, program activities, etc.

Ask Program Providers	Consider while Gapping Independently
- How is my program fee broken down? - Where will I be housed? - What tour companies and restaurants are part of the program? - What type of transportation is part of the program? - Does your organization contribute financially to your partner organizations' projects?	How can I spend my money for housing, food, transportation, and activities in a way that benefits local communities?

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9. Ethical Engagement with Animals

Principle definition: *As a roadmap for best practices in animal engagement, consider the Five Freedoms for Animal Welfare from the American Humane Society, adapted by Nora Livingstone, Founder and CEO of [Animal Engagement International](#) to the context of volunteering with animals. See her blog, [Ethical Engagement with Animals on Gap Year Experiences](#) on the GYA website.*

- Have you reviewed the [Five Agreed Upon Freedoms](#) for Animals in Captivity, and glossary for animal engagement (sanctuary, refuge, rehabilitation center)?
- 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)
- Does the CBO working with animals have an ethical euthanasia policy?
- Do your projects that work with animals have an animal welfare policy? Was this policy developed by veterinarians and behaviorists?
- Is contact with wild animals limited only to necessary interaction?
- Do you ensure animal projects do not engage with, and actively work against the practices of [canned hunting](#) and [wild animals as entertainers](#)?
- Is there a thorough risk assessment in place for students and animals? This can include risk to st
- Potentially problematic activities, such as students cleaning out wildlife cages or risk/endangerment to animals. (both the physical but mental safety of all animals) situations:

    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 you're using it indicates your commitment to increasing reciprocity, equitability, and ethical responsibility in your engagement with global and domestic community-based organizations. 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.

The Students Guide to Fair Trade Learning was especially informed and developed by: Julia Green, Eva Walker, Nora Livingstone, Dominique Robinson, Marion Taylor, Elizabeth Bezark, and Caitlin Ferrarini.

Further Resources and Information

Applications and Adaptations of Fair Trade Learning

Fair Trade Learning (FTL) is extensively used beyond the Gap Year Association (GYA)'s adaptation in GYA's Official Standards of Accreditation. The Forum on Education Abroad uses FTL to inform their Guidelines for Community Engaged Learning Experiences Abroad for global higher education. Additionally, several colleges and universities as well as global education providers outside of the gap year education sphere use FTL as a set of guideposts in their global education 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 (the Collaborative). Members of this committee include both members of GYA and the Collaborative. They serve as gap year program provider operations staff, gap year consultants, as well as study abroad and higher education professionals. For more information about this committee and its members, visit the GYA FTL Committee webpage.

Committee Mission: To develop resources for organizations and individuals to use to improve their global/domestic partnerships by applying Fair Trade Learning principles.

Note from Committee Members: Fair Trade Learning principles go beyond simplistic use of phrases like 'including the locals' or using the words 'ethical' and 'responsible' superficially. These 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**.