



This letter confirms your intent to apply for Accreditation by the Gap Year Association. This Engagement Letter lays out expectations for applicants before, during, and following the application process.

The Gap Year Association (GYA) is the Standards Development Organization (SDO) for gap year education as recognized by the U.S. Department of Justice and Federal Trade Commission. GYA's Standards & Accreditation Committee is composed of GYA members voluntarily representing the gap year field at large, including: gap year program staff, gap year consultants, risk management consultants, legal professionals, gap year alumni and family members, and experts in other relevant fields. The committee meets on a bi-monthly basis (6+ times per year), and updates GYA's Standards of Accreditation every 3-5 years.

The application process typically takes between 4 and 6 months to complete, depending upon a variety of factors. Gap Year Program Providers seeking to maintain GYA Accreditation after a successful application must apply for re-accreditation every 4 years, with a self-review conducted 2 years after (re)accreditation. More details are provided below.

While it is our hope that GYA Accreditation will translate to more enrollments, our accreditation process is not designed primarily as a marketing channel for our members, but rather to professionalize our membership. GYA's Seal of Accreditation represents those organizations that have demonstrated the highest caliber of gap year education through passage of all relevant standards.

## **PRIMARY BENEFITS OF ACCREDITATION**

1. Professionalization and benchmarking using the U.S. Department of Justice-approved Standards for Gap Year Education. Many programs that pursue GYA Accreditation state that the quality, integrity, and professionalism of their programs are strengthened as a direct result of the suggestions, feedback, and opportunities to revise existing materials that are a part of the Accreditation review process.
2. Ability to participate in GYA's College Credit Program through GYA's School of Record relationship with the University of Montana (UM). Students on GYA-Accredited Programs can earn up to 12 semester credits. Details include:
  - Flat fee of \$1,950/student for up to 4 courses through UM, with minimal additional administrative requirements from program staff,
  - Increased access to *and* enrollment in your programs by leveraging 529 tax-deferred college savings funds to pay for program tuition,
  - Academically recognized value of high-quality experiential education.
3. Listing on GYA's [Accredited Programs](#) webpage, in addition to the [General Programs](#) page
4. Ability to use GYA's Seal of Accreditation on all outreach/marketing materials
5. [Accreditation Plaque](#) to display at fairs and promotional events

6. GYA Accreditation Seal placed on all listings through marketing partners such as GoOverseas & Teenlife
7. Exclusive discounts and listing status with GYA-partnered organizations
8. Attributed photos in GYA promotional materials
9. Discounts with Industry Partner Members (e.g. travel insurance)
10. General Program Provider member benefits such as:
  - a. Program-specific public profile on GYA's website
  - b. Discounted rates on the [Gap Year Conference](#) and other [professional development opportunities](#)
  - c. Access to gap year experts, data, trends, and an incredible working community of high-quality peers

## **ACCREDITATION TIMELINE & PROCESS**

All parties involved in reviewing an accreditation application must sign GYA's standard NDA form to ensure that proprietary materials you submit are kept private. GYA uses a cloud-based system with basic encryption to ensure that your materials, once submitted, remain private.

The Standards have been authored to accommodate a wide variety of possible gap year options. In addition, you may request an exemption from any standard pending an explanation of your reasoning. Inevitably, each organization will have unique approaches that fit within the breadth of gap year options available to their students. It is the intent of this process to focus on safety and a pedagogically sound experience for your students, which may look different for each organization depending on the context within which their programs operate.

Accreditation is not a guaranteed outcome of the application process. In the event that an organization is denied GYA Accreditation after our extensive review and professional mentorship opportunities, we encourage the organization to view denial as an opportunity for growth and improvement, and to re-apply after two years.

## **APPLICATION STEPS**

1. Review the current Standards of Accreditation to be sure your organization is ready to apply and will be able to meet the timelines associated with the application process.
2. Sign & date this Accreditation Engagement Letter and submit it to [info@gapyearassociation.org](mailto:info@gapyearassociation.org).
3. Submit the [Pre-Application Assessment Form](#) to determine which of the five sections in the Standards will apply to your organization.
4. Remit a non-refundable deposit of \$1,500 that is applied to your total Accreditation Review Fee (either \$3,000 or \$4,000 depending on the size of your program). Payment can be made via credit card, wire transfer, ACH, or check. The final payment of the application fee will be due within 30 days of successfully completing the accreditation process. Note: currently Accredited organizations seeking re-accreditation will receive an invoice for the full Accreditation Review Fee after receipt of the Engagement Letter and Pre-Application Assessment Form.
5. Receive access to the online application system from GYA staff. Applicants have 90 days to submit their application once granted access. If the application is not completed within 90 days, the organization must either:

- a. Pause their application until a later date, at which time they may start over and submit a new Accreditation Review Fee, or
  - b. Consult with GYA staff to determine whether or not they have completed a sufficient portion of the application in order to proceed with an Initial Assessment.
6. Complete the online application by submitting appropriate evidence for each Standard. The time required to complete an application will vary depending on whether new documents or systems need to be created. Submitted documents must be current as of 4 years prior to the date of application.
7. Submit a GYA-provided survey from 10-15 of your recent (past two years) gap year alumni.
8. Submit a GYA-provided survey from 2-3 of your recent (past two years) gap year staff.
9. Within 60 days of submitting a complete application, you will receive an “Initial Assessment” of your application, in which each Standard will be marked as either:
  - a. **Pass** (indicating the evidence provided meets or exceeds the Standard),
  - b. **Pass with Suggestions** (indicating the evidence provided minimally meets the Standard for this application, but GYA will offer suggestions for improvement for future reviews),
  - c. **Investigate** (indicating that GYA needs further clarification and/or additional evidence in order to meet the Standard), or
  - d. **Exception Granted** (for any Standards that the Organization marked as “Not Applicable”).
10. Your organization will then respond to any questions or issues in the Initial Assessment and typically provide new evidence to support GYA’s understanding of your program and the assertion that standards have been met. This process may take multiple rounds of review.
11. Once your application includes fewer than five remaining “Investigates,” your application will then be passed to an external advisor for review. We expect advisors to return their assessment within two weeks of receiving an application. This is typically the final step in the accreditation process.

## **ACCREDITATION FEES AND PROGRAM PROVIDER MEMBERSHIP DUES**

- Total Accreditation fee (including \$1,500 non-refundable deposit) of \$3,000 (for programs who served 150 or fewer gap year students in the prior calendar year) or \$4,000 (for programs that served more than 150 gap year students in the prior calendar year) for every accreditation application. Fees are collected once for every four-year application cycle.
- Accreditation fees are only due during review years
- Organizations that run multiple programs should complete only one application. Organizations that have different brands must complete a separate application for each brand seeking accreditation by GYA.
- GYA Membership dues are separate from Accreditation fees and paid annually according to the Program Provider rates:
  - 0 - 50 gap year students = \$400 per year
  - 51 - 100 gap year students = \$575 per year
  - 101 - 200 gap year students = \$1,100 per year
  - 200 + gap year students = \$2,200 per year

*\* GYA considers “gap year students” to be those who are 17-24 years old and “on program” for at least 4 weeks.*

## **COMMITMENTS**

By signing this document, I represent that I am authorized to sign on behalf of the Organization applying for Accredited Membership in the Gap Year Association (GYA). Furthermore, my Organization agrees to:

- Abide by GYA's Standards of Accreditation even when not under Accreditation Review
- Communicate with parents & students in a professional, timely, and respectful manner
- Attend a GYA conference at least once every three years
- Participate in a required self-study two years after formal Accreditation (GYA reserves the right to request evidence from the self-study for up to 10 standards)
- In the event of a fatality, near-fatality, or other critical event during a gap year program, the Organization shall notify GYA's Executive Director as soon as practicable following the event, consistent with any applicable privacy regulations and any other legal or law enforcement requirements or requests
- Review your organization's admissions process annually
- Emphasize experiential training methods for staff and students whenever the opportunity allows
- Share surveys with recent alumni and field staff (GYA will send you program-specific links)
- Abide by the GYA Ethics and Judicial process as determined by GYA. This process may result in probationary status and potential expulsion from the GYA Membership without refund of any fees paid (for example, organizations should refrain from buying other organizations' hashtags or key phrases/names as Google Ad words; refuse to copy content from competitors without proper attribution/permission; etc.) [An overview of GYA's process for responding to grievances can be found at this link.](#)
- Participate in GYA research (directed by the GYA Research Committee): complete the annual State of the Field Survey and encourage alumni to complete the Gap Year Alumni Questionnaire
- Avoid using any proof of GYA Accreditation (e.g., GYA plaques and seals) in the event that GYA membership lapses or the Organization loses its status as a GYA-Accredited program
- Indemnify GYA and its staff and members against any lawsuit arising out of the Organization's gross negligence or willful misconduct

**Organization Name:**

**Organization's Address:**

**My Name (printed):**

**Date:**

**My Signature:**