

A simple online search will quickly reveal just how many international program opportunities are available to you. No matter whether you're pursuing an internship, volunteer term, teaching placement or work-study experience, chances are you'll have to put together an application. This is a particularly important process for those who want to work with an NGO or other non-profit, since competition for volunteer positions can be stiff. For experiences like voluntourism or work-study a comprehensive application may not be required but we still recommend going through the process outlined below.

### Self-Evaluation

Self-evaluation is a crucial part of every application process! Schedule some time to sit down and assess your strengths, weaknesses and motivations. We recommend doing this first step in writing. This process is enlightening and will help you create a stand-out application and speak confidently about yourself.

### Understand Yourself

International programs, particularly volunteer programs, thrive on the passion of participants. Having a clear sense of purpose is crucial. Use the self-evaluation process to uncover your personal motivations, values and strengths. Let the process guide you towards building an application that demonstrates your determination and self-awareness. Though you're likely anxious to set the wheels of your international adventure in motion, don't skip these crucial steps! Take the time necessary to truly understand yourself first. This step will help you write a compelling application.

### Interview Yourself

Begin the self-evaluation process with a solo interview. In this exercise, you'll take on the roles of both interviewer and candidate. Ask yourself why you're seeking this particular experience. What are your motivations? Why have you selected this organization or opportunity? Are you interested in a particular issue or location? Likely, you have specific goals for yourself, such as gaining professional experience, enhancing language skills or having the satisfaction of knowing you've made a difference. Think about how these relate to the mandate of your chosen organization. Do this until you feel confident and able to discuss your unique skill set and sense of purpose. This process can also help you select an organization or experience if you haven't yet made a decision.

### Make an Inventory of Your Skills

Every experience is a skill-building experience! Generate a list of all your previous experiences and the tasks associated with each one. Include work with student groups, volunteer organizations and even short-term service-related projects. No matter what type of program you're applying to, it's useful to create an exhaustive list of skills and experiences before whittling it down. You never know whether an organization is in need of candidates with language, technical, administrative or even agricultural skills. So, think broadly!

Your commitment to the organization's mission is a key component of your application. Understanding who you're applying to work with (and why) is imperative. Use your skill inventory to help you explain how previous activities and academic experiences have led you to make your application for this specific opportunity.

### Understand Your Organization

Alongside your self-evaluation work, you should be conducting in-depth research into your chosen organization/s. How does the organization govern itself? What's their history, mandate and work style? This process is important, because you may find that an organization isn't actually so well-suited to your needs as you expected. Alternatively, you may find that the more you learn about a particular organization, the more enthusiastic you become, in which case your newfound knowledge will help you craft an even better application.

Start by reading and watching everything you can about the organization. Pay particular attention to their mission statement or mandate, as well as any sponsors. (Sponsors will only be a consideration for NGO and volunteer positions.) Even if you happen to have a personal connection within the organization, this step is important. Understanding the organization's sponsors and funding structure will give you a deeper understanding of how best to focus your application. If an interview is involved, you'll also be able to talk intelligently about the organization's operations.

Consider seeking out former participants to learn more about the organization's operations and culture from someone who has worked there. Each piece of information you gather will help you amp up your application materials and prove that you're the perfect candidate.

### Making Your Application

Once you've completed your self-assessment and carefully researched one or more organizations or programs that suit you, it's time to build your application. Begin by reading each and every one of the requirements with care. There's nothing worse than missing out on an opportunity because of a technicality that you overlooked accidentally! If you think submitting additional materials will improve the strength of your application package, be sure to contact the organization and ask if they will allow it. Simply including additional materials could be perceived as arrogant.

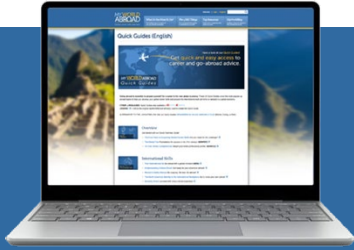
When no requirements are specified, it's safe to submit a one-page resume and cover letter – both of which should be tailored to the specific opportunity:

- **Align yourself with the organization:** When composing your tailored resume and cover letter, highlight the skills and goals that match the organization's mandate. Feature your skills in such a way that they reflect the goals of the organization.
- **Use concrete examples:** Illustrate your qualifications with thoughtful details. For example, instead of saying "I've worked with kids in the past," say, "For six months, I led a weekly story circle for schoolchildren at the local library, which has ignited my interest in children's literacy."
- **Don't address your weaknesses:** Although you should be aware of them, and may have to discuss them in the event of an interview, avoid focusing on perceived deficiencies in your application.
- **Be realistic:** Focus on the positive, but be honest and accurate. If you're applying for a program where you must submit a budget, be realistic. Don't try to strategically over- or under-budget in order to be selected.

The go-abroad application process isn't something to be slapped together over a weekend. Take the time to explore, understand yourself, and get to know your target organization. Align yourself with their mandate and get good at selling your skills with confidence. We wish you luck!

# The Go Abroad Application Process

Make a difference while building global career skills



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