

SELECTING AND EVALUATING A WORK/VOLUNTEER/STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM

Before starting on your work, study or travel abroad program, consider the following about the organization with which you may be involved.

KNOWLEDGE OF ORGANIZATION:

- What do you really know about the organization you are considering?
- How did you learn about it?
- What other information is available? Brochures? Information Sessions?
- Can former clients be contacted about their experiences?
- Is there a representative on-campus whom you could consult?
- Is there an advertised office/representative in the host country whom you could contact?
- Is your advisor/counsellor familiar with the organization?
- How is the organization funded: CIDA, other government, private or religious organizations?
- You can also contact the Better Business Bureau for details.

PURPOSE OF ORGANIZATION:

- Many organizations appear to be academically oriented when in fact they are only interested in travel sales.
- Is it a *bona fide* work/study organization?
- Does it have an established experience of placing students in academic or work environments?
- Does the organization specify types of placements?
- What is the philosophy of the organization - humanitarian, missionary, for profit?
- Do you share this philosophy?
- Does the organization display general respect for the people of the host country?

LOCATION, RESPONSIBILITIES:

- Where is the official base in Canada? (Find an address instead of just a website)
- Who is responsible if complications arise and legal action is necessary?
- Is there a Canadian office or branch that would be subject to Canadian laws?

FEES:

- Is there an application fee? How much?
- What does it cover? What does it NOT cover?
- What percentage is for administrative fees?
- How does it compare with other organizations' fees?
- Is there a consultant or third party involved in your connection to the organization? If so, who pays them: you or the organization?
- Will the fee (or part of) be refunded if there is any kind of cancellation by you or by the organization?

SELECTION PROCESS:

- Is the selection process explained upfront?
- Any costs involved?

ACTIVITIES:

- What will you be expected to do on this program: volunteer work, manual labour, skilled labour?
- Do you have the opportunity to choose the type of activities?
- Do you feel qualified to do the type of work?
- What kind of training will be provided, including cross-cultural and language training?
- Who will take responsibility if some aspect of your work is done incorrectly - you or the organization?
- Does the organization take steps to ensure a safe working and living environment?
- What kind of orientation is provided (pre-departure and upon your return)?

ACCOMMODATION:

- Will accommodation be provided or will you have to find it yourself?
- What kind of accommodation is available/planned? Host families, hotels, dormitories, tents?

ACCREDITATION:

- Will study or work be counted for academic credit?
- How will your work be assessed? If accreditation exists, how is it handled and do you receive a transcript?
- Check all transfers of course credits with your home institution *before* you study abroad.

BENEFITS:

- Is health insurance available? If so, who pays? What is covered? Get details.
- Are long-term disability and life insurance available?
- Will you be repatriated at the organization's expense should you be seriously ill or die?
- Will you be repatriated at the organization's expense should there be a family emergency in your home country?
- What kind of health care is available in the host country?
- Are there any reduced travel and maintenance costs?
- Inquire about work permit regulations: if you work, are there tax options? What are working conditions?

BOTTOM-LINE:

- Select an organization that is well known and that clearly advertises its function. It should also define the hazards as well as the advantages of working abroad.
- Many organizations are not officially connected with the Canadian government, education and cultural exchange programs; they are private enterprises.

**For more information visit the Centre for international Programs' Resource Centre,
Level 3, University Centre
or email cip@uoguelph.ca**

**More resources on working, studying and volunteering abroad can be found at
<http://www.uoguelph.ca/CIP>**