



## Common Critiques and Concerns of Global Brigades

Please use this document as a constantly evolving resource to address critiques and concerns about Global Brigades' model. One of the values of our organization is "collaboration." As such, we will always invite critique and constructive feedback to improve our organization. It has certainly been based on such feedback that we have built our organization. **If you have additional critiques or responses to add, please email your chapter advisor to update this document.**

### What can students do in a week?

- A small piece of a larger project. With only one group and one week and no full-time on the ground teams there is pretty limited impact
- GB demonstrates the power of replicable/scalable systems. We are hundreds of groups repeatedly going to communities over time.
- On-the ground teams role. Employ 100s of local staff
- Talk about all our impact statistics. I.e. for every water brigade volunteer to Honduras, 4 community members received access to clean water.

### Why aren't you working here? (Meaning in Canada, US, UK, Europe) There is local poverty.

- Why is it mutually exclusive?
- GB's strength is the leadership development, personal and professional growth that students go through is absolutely translatable to their future community work upon their return.
- Students come home with a transformative experience/ different perspective that makes them more effective to work in more diverse community groups.
- Difference between absolute and relative poverty
- Importance of organizations to focus. We can't be all things to everyone. We can't even be all things to the communities we're partnering with. We have to choose the low-hanging projects that students are good collaborators for. (i.e. latrines are sexy story)

### How are you different from a voluntourism organization?

- Talk through all of the grants we have been rewarded for sustainable development work that we earned because of the effectiveness of our model, year-round work, AND the volunteers who participate that help match those donations/grants: World Bank, Path, Interamerican Development Bank (FOMIN), Kiva, Rotary, Local governments, etc.
- Opportunity to talk about all of the measures GB puts in place for sustainability, holistic model, impact and evaluation reports, [annual report](#), etc.
- Very offensive comment/category to both our community committees and the nearly 100 local technicians and GB staff that are working year-round to perpetuate projects.

- Not to mention, very insulting to our students, who are going down with the intention of completing health and development projects, not to take a week to do a poverty tour.

### **Why students?**

- Search Africa findings of isolationism went to 17 different countries and met with hundreds of communities, NGOs, governments and the most recurring theme is the issue of isolationism. The inability to share and exchange with different perspectives. People in the developing world (especially in remote villages) often feel trapped. They cannot just get a visa to come and visit Europe or visit anywhere else for that matter. They are limited to just the experiences and stories and best practices of local environments. Personal growth/human growth is based on knowledge exchange. (And students get to gain as much from the community members as the other way around), so that's another great argument for why students)
- Still, if there are students that would rather contribute funds and have it go directly
- Our mission has two stakeholders. Students and Communities. It's our organization's mission to empower both and create a learning exchange for both.
- Creating future leaders to
- Humble approach
- Disarming. Governments/community leaders/community members are very interested in sharing their culture to students wanting to learn. It is very different from coming in with just older professionals who are just there to implement their will or ideas (classical development work). Old white people come down to build a well, they don't engage community, no community buy-in, they leave and have no capacity to perpetuate it.

### **Some students might be going down with a savior mentality: I'm going to go help the poor people.**

- It's not our values and we do everything it is our mission to transform this perspective: read the mission statement and our values. Last part of mission: to change hearts and minds of participants to live in a more equal world
- Empowerment. Communities are empowering our students as much as students are empowering communities. It is a 2-way street.
- Pre-brigade curriculums

### **Sustainability, what if students stop coming**

- Very fair critique
- Yes, we are at risk, if we don't keep students engaged the projects will not continue
- Importance of succession plans on campus
- Importance of continued chapter growth
- Importance of diversifying revenue streams
- BUT, would bet on students passion over grant money any day of the week

### **Why aren't you in more countries/Do you intend to grow?**

- GB has no intention of expanding beyond its current countries
- Need a one-by-one mentality as much as possible when it comes to doing the sustainable dev projects (Medical Brigades a bit different, but still important b/c it lays the groundwork, builds trust in communities in us, builds capacity with community leaders before more sophisticated programming comes in. Also great way to get baseline information)

### **Isn't it better to send the money?**

- Search Africa example: went to 17 different countries met with hundreds of communities, NGOs, governments and the most recurring theme is the issue of isolationism. The inability to share and exchange with different perspectives. People in the developing world (especially in remote villages) often feel trapped. They cannot just get a visa to come and visit Europe or visit anywhere else for that matter. They are limited to just the experiences and stories and best practices of local environments. Personal growth/human growth is based on knowledge exchange. (And students get to gain as much from the community members as the other way around), so that's another great argument for why students)
- Still, if there are students that would rather contribute funds and have it go directly to Sustainable Transition Projects or Project Continuation Fund, it's an amazing opportunity to donate to something where 100% will get to work in the communities without admin costs
- Opportunity to directly see where your donations are going

### **Where does all the money go? Is it all going to some guy's pocket?**

- Can show CEO's video budget presentation or the [finance breakdown graph](#) on our website
- Chairpersons vote on every line item of our budget
- All entities undergo 3<sup>rd</sup> party financial audits
- No office in North America or Europe
- Admin costs less than 6% (including 2% credit card fees)
- Any surplus funds go toward Sustainable Transition Projects
- No employee makes six figure income

### **Aren't you doing a lot of environmental harm with having students fly**

- Yes, it is our largest negative externality. Yes, you have to get on a plane to participate in the program. Two years ago we had an external firm calculate how much money it would take to offset our carbon footprint. It was calculated, but campus chairpersons voted not to pay it as they wanted to reserve those funds for water projects and community bank capitalization (STF). In the future, we can seek funding to offset carbon footprint. AND in future, our eco-stoves and reforestation projects have a strong



likelihood to offset overall footprint once we scale them more.

**What if you are giving out chronic medicine and they don't get refills?**

- We have brigades that come every three to four months
- Most of our communities DO have some access to local doctors (hours away where they can get refills).
- We have community health workers in a lot of communities (trying to grow it)

**Do students treat patients?**

- Absolutely not. They shadow and help with all the stations on brigades that are appropriate for their skill levels.
- It is our policy that no one can perform a task that they are not licensed to do in their home country

**Is this another form of colonialism?**

- Is Global Brigades taking resources and exploiting local communities for its gain?  
Absolutely not. Communities request to partner with Global Brigades and we partner with them to develop their health and development goals.
- Empowerment: community owned banks, local committees, capacity building, all money is staying in-country not coming back to the US/Canada

**Are we imposing our culture/will on them?**

- If we don't go or critics discourage us, we don't give the communities the right to even choose their involvement. Critics are making that choice for them (isn't that more imperialistic)?
- Ultimately, We are providing opportunity and empowerment. No community member is forced to participate in our projects
- Communities are inviting us to come. We would never go into a community where we were not welcomed and formally invited
- For sustainable dev projects, families must have buy-in to the project. They are choosing to have it (whether through labor and/or their own money)
- We believe we are addressing basic human rights. We are not proselytizing Western beliefs. Even Microfinance Brigades, yes, we are teaching savings, but the Maya and Inca have very sophisticated savings and crop storage systems.

**General pointers:**

- Do not be defensive! Make sure people are heard and never cut someone off who is speaking
- Invite critics and hear them out. Much of GB's policies have been improved/changed by

hearing feedback! GB makes decisions based on this type of student dialog and feedback is imperative to our growth

- The types of critics that will always be against your views and you will often just have to agree to disagree:
  - They are against cultural exchange and believe isolationism is best. We can't do anything about that world view other than to hear their opinion and agree to disagree
  - They do not believe students can transform to enter communities with a humble/partner approach.
  - If they are completely opposed to western medicine (although still can argue that it's the participants choice to accept the medicine)
  - They believe that ethically it is better to ignore a person who has a rotten tooth that needs to be pulled than to pull it out through an external intervention (that example can be extrapolated to many programs). (However, an argument against this view is that it is perhaps even more unethical to make that decision on behalf of that patient) Who is your teacher or academic critique to decide some person's fate in the developing world? By discouraging students to participate they are robbing community members the opportunity to choose on whether they would like our partnership.