

Network for Voluntary Development in Asia (NVDA) Marketing Ethics



PURPOSE OF THE GUIDELINE

The NVDA Marketing Ethics has been produced to provide a standard marketing guideline, which all organizations working in the field of international voluntary service should aim to follow. NVDA members should comply to NVDA's marketing ethics to ensure volunteers, the hosting communities, and the hosting and sending organizations will have a clear and accurate understanding and description of the project and local situation.

Honest marketing is essential for participants to understand the nature of the project they are signing up for and to create trust between the IVS organization, beneficiary communities, and participants. Being honest about the expected impact of the volunteer project is essential. By us being honest about the organization's impact, participants can better discern the right fit for them and will not be disappointed by contrasting realities. Organizations that prioritize responsible volunteering are more likely to prioritize responsible marketing. This is important to separate IVS organizations who value responsible volunteering and marketing to other forms of voluntourism, which may not comply to the following marketing ethics.

This guideline will consist of a list of areas members should be aware of with explanations and examples.

This guideline is created based on the book, "Learning Service," and "The International Voluntourism Guidelines for Commercial Tour Operators." Some examples and explanations are taken directly from the above two sources.

RESPONSIBLE MARKETING

Don't GreenWash

- What is GreenWash:
 - Greenwashing is when a company deceptively attempts to appear environmentally-friendly when it's really not.
- Example(s) of GreenWashing:
 - "An oil company conducting an ocean clean-up project to protect the environment after an oil spill. These initiatives are normally taken up by companies after they have been given directives by the government after committing an environmental offense, It usually gives the company an illusion

of compliance while, in real sense, it is the opposite of the case as they are just covering up the acts of environmental degradation previously done.”

Avoid All Forms of Poverty Marketing

- Poverty Marketing can be when you use images or words that may belittle or degrade the local people. Such imagery often relies on a simplistic view of poverty, falling back on old stereotypes, and can be extremely damaging.
- Question to ask when selecting images to use or choosing words to describe the project
 - “If it was your [child/sister/brother/mother/etc] in the picture, or if those words were written about your family, would you be comfortable?”
- Example(s) of Poverty Marketing:
 - “Helping people who cannot help themselves”
 - “[The children’s home] has approximately 10 children who are currently residing there. It is very poorly equipped and they lack sufficient funds to support all the children’s needs.”
 - “fundraising or volunteer recruitment materials that have images of run down homes, malnourished and crying babies, or women carrying water on their heads through parched fields, perhaps with an audio voice over giving you shocking statistics and messages about people who ‘have no voice.’”

Avoid Describing the Project Location as a Tourist Destination or overusing the language and imagery of tourism

- Although it is fair to recognize volunteer travelers are still travellers and therefore interested in the sites and attractions of the country they are placed in, it is important to remind volunteer that if they want to travel, please do so before and after the project so they don’t expect project to include sightseeing in them.
- Example(s)
 - lush jungles, spectacular beaches, etc.
 - “As a volunteer in Nepal, you can ride on the backs of elephants through lush jungles, trek through snowy mountains, raft down rivers and participate in an abundance of outdoor and cultural activities.”

Avoid Promoting Complicated Issues with Lopsided and Simplistic Views

- Issues like development, poverty, aid, etc. are very complicated and can be open for debate. Many companies often avoid revealing their complexity because they want to convince as many people as possible to join the project, which might also lead to volunteers thinking the problem is easily solvable when indeed it’s much more complex. We want to recognize these problems being tackled are complex, and that whatever skills and experience a volunteer might bring, they may only be a small part of a wider solution. We want volunteers to travel and learn about and understand complex global issues so they will have a view to take future action to address them.
- Example(s) of complicated issues that shouldn’t be marketed where the impact to these issues will be easy and have immediate effect

- “Long term social changes such as improving education systems or increasing incomes, is a slow and multilayer process, in which outsiders can usually play only a minor role.”

Avoid Overemphasizing the “Need” for Volunteers

- Sustainable projects often requires the contribution and involvement of local people, as well-not just the volunteers. If the project description makes it seems like the organization is desperate for volunteers or volunteers are there to save the day, then they might de-emphasized the roles of the local people or might over-simplify the problem. Relying on recruiting volunteers to fill vital roles in a community can also make the project unsustainable.
- Example(s)
 - “Kibera needs land/tendancy rights, housing, water, electricity, health clinics, education, employment, security plus much more...money cannot help without people to direct it-all the organizations require assistance. They all need intelligent, keen, willing, and compassionate people to help. In the western world it has become common for many students to take a Gap Year out before or after university. More older people are now taking a year out away from their everyday life. Many could work in Kibera where they would achieve a real sense of doing some good. Kibera is crying out for people to help.”

Avoid Presenting Volunteer as the Hero/Savior of the Story

- While of course there are heroic people doing unpaid work all over the world, not all volunteering is necessarily heroic. Often times, the IVS organization, the local community and volunteers all together pays a role in the positive impact. It’s good to share the volunteer’s side of the story, but it is also important to not misrepresent the story and excludes the other important actors (IVS organizations preparing volunteers, local people working for changes in their own community, etc) as well
- How it can mislead volunteers: Not all voluntary work is exciting and fun, despite the fact that these work may be necessary and based on the local needs. Volunteers who have read these heroic stories may have certain expectations of the type of work they will do and the degree of impact of their work, which might not be the same kind in some of our IVS work. **It is important to let volunteers know projects are driven by the local needs and not by the desires of the travelers to “feel good.”** It is important to share why the specific type of work, no matter how mundane or seemingly insignificant, is necessary and important.
- Example(s)
 - “The highlight of the trip is certainly the smiles of families when you give them the keys to their brand new home.”

Fueling Empathy Instead of Sympathy

- What are the differences between sympathy and empathy
 - Sympathy

- feeling compassion, sorrow, or pity for the hardships that another person encounters
 - Empathy
 - putting yourself in the shoes of another, the ability to experience the feelings of another person, which goes beyond sympathy, respect and get to know them
- Please avoid using phrases that will present the people overseas as helpless victims waiting for a savior. “While sympathy builds a desire to help, empathy builds a desire to understand, and only through that understanding are we able to contribute our support most wisely.”
- Try to include in the project descriptions opportunities for volunteers to share, exchange, and learn with the local people to promote empathy
- Example of fueling sympathy:
 - “Due to lack of support and education around disability awareness in Kenya, many disabled children and adults are hidden from public view by their families...[T]here are increasing numbers of children born with either mental or physical disabilities, such as Cerebral Palsy and Down Syndrome, who do not have access to support and cannot fend for themselves.”

Provide Accurate and Honest Information to Establish Realistic Expectations

- We do not want to mislead the participants into having unrealistic expectations so it is important to provide accurate and honest information. Establishing realistic expectations about the volunteers’ experience and what the volunteers will accomplish during their volunteer project will determine the success of the volunteer trip, for everyone involved. Educating and informing volunteers is important both for the enjoyment of their trip and how successfully they’ll interact and contribute to the project and the community.
- Use positive and effective messaging strategies where the messages should clearly convey the goals of the IVS programs, why they are important and how the program is sustainable/positively impact the local communities
 - Focus on concrete examples of what volunteers can expect to gain in terms of experiences and perspectives, as well as the impact of the projects
 - Make sure the IVS organization and the local partners share the same message about why the volunteer project are needed in the community
- The programs should clearly communicate project impact and demonstrate why volunteers are genuinely required, and help educate travelers about the social, environmental and economic issues that the project aims to address.
- Questions to considered when managing expectations of the applicant
 - Are realistic project and personal goals established and communicated to the volunteer in the promotional materials?
 - Do promotional materials reflect realistic expectations about what can be accomplished during a short-term volunteer project? Is the volunteer aware of how the short-term volunteer project contributes to the long-term goals of the organization and community?

- Do the words used to describe your organization/project in your marketing materials accurately describe what you are providing such “voluntourism”, “ecotourism”, “responsible tourism”? Is your organization’s interpretation of such terms clearly defined?
- Are volunteers prepared to place their personal needs and expectations secondary to the needs of the project? Can the marketing style be more towards the applicant’s needs (ie. flexible, no experiences/qualification necessary, reasonable, tourist destination for sightseeing, etc), which may allow the applicants to feel their need may be prioritized, rather than that of the local community?
- Is the project fees/inscription fee/application fee clearly stated with a transparent and accurate sharing of where the money collected from the volunteer will go to?
- Example(s) of possibility creating unrealistic expectations in volunteers:
 - “Whether you’re interested in developing resources in one of the most deprived areas of Thailand or helping to build stronger homes for families having to make do with cardboard and dirt floors in Guatemala-finding your own volunteer building project will be a breeze.”

Respectful Marketing

- It is important to be careful with our word and picture choice when promoting to not disrespect the local community and also include the local communities effort in the project.
- Questions to considered:
 - Are there images or information provided in the promotional material (facebook, website, program book, etc.) that may harm or embarrass the local people or communities?
 - Are descriptions of the places honest or are might they be ethnocentric and/or exaggerated (ie. “squalor”, “desperate”, etc)?
 - Are the opinions and contributions of local staff/volunteers/people also included with the stories/opinions of the international volunteers?

REFERENCES

- The International Ecotourism Society: *International Voluntourism Guideline for Commercial Tour Operators*
 - www.ecotourism.org/voluntourism-guidelines
- Claire Bennett, Daniela Papi-Thornton, Joseph Collins, and Zahara Heckscher, *Learning Service: The Essential Guide to Volunteering Abroad*, Red Press Limited, 2018