

Guidance for preparing high-risk travel petitions

University travel to or through high-risk locations is generally not permitted. Recognizing that Northeastern is a global university and that there may be compelling reasons to make exceptions, travelers may submit a petition to the Global Safety and Security Assessment committee.

There is no single criterion or benchmark that the Global Safety and Security Assessment Committee (GSSAC) uses when determining whether it can support a petition for travel to high-risk locations. Rather, committee members deliberate, discuss, and make holistic judgments on a case-by-case basis.

That said, there are three key elements to a petition that committee members must agree are persuasively presented: (1) a compelling reason for the proposed activity, (2) traveler preparedness to undertake the proposed activity, and (3) a thorough and appropriate plan for mitigating those risks and responding to potential dangers.

Successful petitions will convince committee members on all three counts. Answers to questions on the petition form need not be lengthy, but they must directly answer the questions in the petitioner's own words.

Below, we list some of the questions the committee asks when considering petitions, followed by advice for petitioners. The questions are not a checklist; they are illustrative of the considerations committee members take into account when deciding whether to support a petition.

Compelling Reason

- Is the proposed activity likely to lead to a positive and significant academic and/or professional outcome?
- Why must the proposed activity take place in this particular location, rather than in a non-high-risk location or remotely?
- Why must the proposed activity take place at this particular time, and not when travel may be safer?
- Would the students' future academic or professional prospects be compromised if they did not participate in the proposed activity?

Advice: Help the committee understand why the proposed activity is important, what tangible results it will yield, and how it fits into your academic, professional, and or personal development trajectory. The committee will not approve university travel to high-risk locations if the proposed activity is just a one-off experience without a significant outcome; if what the traveler is hoping to learn or accomplish could readily be done in some other way; or if the traveler presents the activity as something they simply want to do or as "nice to have" on their resumé.

Traveler Preparedness

- Is the traveler fully aware of the risks and their severity?
- Does the traveler understand the importance of identifying and mitigating risks?
- Has the traveler taken the appropriate steps to obtain reliable information and advice?
- Does the traveler have previous travel experience?
- Does the traveler have familiarity with or experience in the location or region?
- Does the traveler have in-country resources and connections to help them navigate challenging and emergency situations?
- Does the traveler demonstrate awareness of cultural differences?

Advice: The committee is not just evaluating the activity and the location; it is also looking for evidence that the petitioner is well-prepared to undertake the travel. You are projecting a version of yourself in the petition. You want to demonstrate that you are an informed, proactive, and mature traveler who will make good decisions. You want to convince the committee that you can handle yourself in difficult or challenging situations. Do not downplay or ignore risks you know about for fear the committee will see the activity as too risky. The committee is well informed and will not approve petitions that do not address all known risks.

Plan for Mitigating Risk and Responding to Dangers

- Does the plan address all known risks?
- Does the plan detail appropriate actions the traveler will take to mitigate risks?
- Does the plan detail appropriate actions the traveler will take if they encounter dangers?
- Does the plan demonstrate that the traveler knows what resources are available to them and how to access those resources?

Advice: No travel is without risk. The committee wants to know that you have anticipated potential dangers, how you can minimize the likelihood of encountering these dangers, and what you would do and where you would go if you nonetheless encountered them. The committee appreciates it when petitioners cite official guidance or protocols established by their host because it shows they have “done their homework,” but do not simply cut and paste from these sources because then the committee may wonder if you understand the material. Put your plan in your own words.