

New Director Dilemma: Local Trust in Onsite Operations

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Tags

Cross-Cultural Issues; Education Abroad; Education Policy; Ethics, Equity, and Social Justice; Leadership and Strategy; Management and Operations; Partnerships; Personnel Management; University/Higher Education

Setting

Susana is the Manager of Onsite Partnerships and Operations for VIDA, a private study abroad organization. For the past year and a half, she has been working to establish a direct enroll program for undergraduate students with Arts University in Porto, Portugal. Susana is very excited about this partnership because the university's curriculum and course offerings are different from VIDA's other partner in the city, the Porto School of Business. In addition, Lidia, the Director of International Programs at Arts University, has a long history of working with faculty-led groups from the United States, and their office truly understands the needs of the US student demographic. With this new partnership, VIDA can now offer a variety of visual and performing arts, humanities, and music courses to students wishing to study in Porto. Susana sees this as an opportunity to recruit more students to a city with historically low enrollment.

Two months before the first three students are set to arrive in Portugal and attend Arts University, VIDA's onsite director for Porto decides to retire. Luckily, before the director leaves, he sends Susana a few names of potential replacements. After interviewing several of these candidates, Susana offers the position to a well-connected local named Maria. Maria used to work for another US study abroad organization, has experience in health and

safety management, and works part time in the international office for Performing Arts College, a small private institution in a town just outside of Porto.

While not ideal, Susana makes the assessment that a part-time onsite director would be feasible to start. Susana needs a program director to be trained and communicating with the students as soon as possible. Due to local regulations about part time employees, Susana and VIDA's Human Resources Director decide to hire Maria on a short-term contract basis for the first academic year. If enrollment improves, Maria's role can be extended and expanded to full-time employee.

Case

During the course of training Maria, Susana hosts a virtual introduction meeting between key stakeholders. This group includes several people at the main VIDA office in the United States; Lidia, the Director of International Programs at Arts University; Alfonso, the Director of International Programs at the Porto School of Business; and the new director, Maria. The call goes smoothly, with everyone making introductions, discussing ideas and collaboration opportunities for orientation sessions in the upcoming academic term, and exchanging contact information in order to meet in person later in the month.

However, two days later Susana receives a worrying email from Lidia at Arts University. She expresses great concern about the newly hired director:

Dear Susana,

Thank you for setting up the opportunity to meet with Maria.

While as a university we would never presume to tell you whom to hire for your company's director, we have many concerns about Maria being your representative here in Porto. I have spoken with the dean, and he agrees with my assessment. Because Maria works for a college that is swiftly becoming a local competitor, Performing Arts College, we believe there may be a conflict of interest for her to represent your students on our campus.

Here at Arts University, we have many proprietary concerns about our intellectual property including class syllabi, orientation procedures, and all of our policies that we've developed over years of working with US students. In general, onsite directors for study abroad organizations have total access to engage with Arts University, and they receive information about our orientation, courses, etc. without a problem. But, in this case, we are concerned that this information could be used by Performing Arts College to increase that university's enrollment of US students.

Please let us know what can be done to remedy this situation.

Best regards,

*Lidia Moreno
Director of International Programs
Arts University*

Susana immediately responds to say that she will converse with the key staff members at VIDA and get back to Lidia within 24 hours. Susana knows that in all countries, the onsite directors are the key representatives of the study abroad organization and must maintain a positive and trusting relationship with the local universities. If any

of the universities do not trust the onsite director, it could seriously impact the relationship with VIDA and might negatively impact the students' experience. With this conflict coming to the surface mere weeks before the students arrive onsite, quick intervention is necessary. Susana meets with the Director of International Operations and the Director of Human Resources at VIDA, and they discuss some key considerations.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- Which relationship should take precedents for the provider in a situation like this – the newly-hired onsite director or Arts University? How does that hierarchy impact the decision-making process?
- What are the ethical issues described in the case?
- What are the key points that need to be communicated jointly, or separately, to Arts University and to Maria?
- What might be the financial, legal, and student experience considerations that are relevant to this case? Which considerations are most important in both the short- and long-term view of programming?
- How should VIDA proceed in this case to manage relationships with all stakeholders and ensure consistency for the students due to arrive onsite?
- What, if any, new procedures or policies could be implemented for future hiring decisions at the program provider to avoid a situation like this in the future?