ARTICLE 26 BACKPACK TRAINING GUIDE AND HANDBOOK

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Summer 2021

This Guide and Handbook will provide you with:

- A brief history of the Backpack Idea
- A basic outline of how the Backpack works
- How to coach Backpackers on making an audiovisual and spoken statement of purpose (My Story/My Future)
- Ethical and Safety Responsibilities of Backpack Guides
- How to Hold a Backpack Event
Introduction

War, natural disaster, economic collapse and poverty can prevent young people from getting a university education, learning a trade or finding a job. The Article 26 Backpack™ is designed to help address those challenges by providing young people a way to best shape, store, and share their professional, vocational and educational identity. Imagine the Backpack as a tool to tell a story to employers or universities about who someone is as person, what her or his goals and aspirations are and the kinds experiences they’ve had in a way that a simple résumé or transcript just can’t.

As a Backpack Guide, you have a critical role to play in helping young people use the Backpack. While many young people who will use the Backpack (we call those who use the Backpack—Backpackers) will be able to use it on their own, many more will need your help.

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Article 26: Right to Education, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 10 December 1948

1. Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

2. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.
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Backpack Guides are more than just technical assistants. They help displaced, disadvantaged and disempowered young people begin to organize their ideas, goals, and hopes — as well as elements of their training, education and experience— so they can reclaim their future and re-envision a path forward for themselves and their societies.

Some Backpackers you work with may feel that the world has forgotten them, and no one cares about them or their future. You may be the first person who has ever reached out to them to help them start to build towards an education or a job.

You are also helping to promote, protect and defend one of the most important of all human rights – the right to education for all.

History of the Backpack

The idea for the Backpack came from studying the experiences of hundreds of thousands of young people who fled the war in Syria. In many cases, they had been attending university or other forms of advanced education before they had to leave their country. University of California, Davis, American University in Beirut, the Institute of International Education and other organizations have conducted research on the ways these young people have — or have not — been able to reconnect with educational or employment opportunities.

This research has found that many of the reasons young people cannot continue their studies or pursue careers has to do with problems with their academic records (transcripts, diplomas, and certificates). Often, they have little understanding of educational or vocational training opportunities. This means that they cannot make universities, scholarship agencies or possible employers understand their educational background, continuing academic or vocational training, and educational and career goals.

The Backpack was developed in 2016 at UC Davis by a team university professionals, registrars and admissions officers, and specialists in the problems of higher education in emergencies. Their goal was to figure out a way to help young people, whose education was interrupted by war or other social problems, use technology, access global expertise in credential evaluation, and employ new ways to assess skills and training to empower them to seek out and connect with educational and other institutions.

They chose the concept of the “Backpack” for two reasons. First, the Backpack has become the universal symbol of the student. Just think about how we see students around the world with their backpacks heading to school in the morning. Second, a backpack has many pockets and compartments that can be filled and closed securely; and it is carried by an individual backpaker. We often carry backpacks filled with what we need across great distances of space and time. The Backpack’s digital component, will travel great distances, but still belong only to the Backpacker.

Key Idea: The Backpack, and everything in it, belongs to the Backpacker!
In 2017 UC Davis received a grant from the Ford Foundation, one of the world’s largest and most respected human rights organizations. The Backpack has received no funding or support from any government. Forming a consortium with the American University of Beirut and the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, a preliminary version of the Backpack was developed and shared with colleagues and displaced and vulnerable young people in November 2017.

The first full scale deployment of the Backpack took place in Lebanon in June, 2018.

**How does the Article 26 Backpack Work?**

The Backpack is a complex, universal human rights tool. At its most basic level it is a way for individuals to effectively and safely store, update, and share their educational and vocational record, achievements, and accomplishments — and then share that record with university admissions officers, scholarship agencies, potential employers or other groups or organizations that may be in a position to help them.

At the same time, the Backpack provides a means by which Backpackers can store and share résumés or examples of creative works, provide assessments of their professional and soft-skills by employers, supervisors and colleagues, and record an oral or audiovisual statement of purpose.

**The Backpacker Bill of Rights**

*The Backpacker has the right to control and keep private the contents of the Backpack;*

*The Backpacker has the right to share the contents of the Backpack with any individual, agency, university or organization he or she chooses;*

*The Backpacker has the right to expect that the digital platform’s software and data storage have significant safeguards against unauthorized access or hacking.*

*The Backpacker has the right to access the contents of the Backpack regardless of location.*

*The Backpacker has the right to delete his or her Backpack at any time.*

*When records, statements, evaluations and creative works are uploaded into the digital platform, collectively, they become the Backpack’s contents.*

*The Backpacker can share the contents of the Backpack using a secure method.*

*The Backpack’s digital platform and contents are stored on a webservice provided by UC Davis that meets security and other needs.*

**Credential Evaluation**

An important feature of the Backpack is the way it can be used to connect Backpackers with international credential evaluators. International credential evaluators are trained to help universities and other educational institutions understand foreign degree programs, courses and the value of grades and credits. In some cases, credential evaluators can identify documents that they believe to be fake. They can also help reconstruct the educational histories of those who have missing documentation. Although this is very difficult.

The Backpacker’s goals determine the way the Backpack is used. For example, if a Backpacker is seeking to enroll in a university, or compete for a fellowship or scholarship, credential evaluation may be needed in order for her or his past academic work to be understood. In such a case, the Backpack administrators will connect that Backpacker to the proper evaluators. It may take several months for an evaluation to be completed. Acceptance of a request to evaluate credentials is at the discretion of the credentialing service administrator. But all requests will be considered and all Backpackers will receive a written response to their requests.
Ethical and Safety Responsibilities of Backpack Guides: Keeping Backpackers and Guides Safe

Ethical behavior means acting in a way that respects the dignity of others. It is expressed through values like honesty, fairness, respect for diversity and promoting universal human rights. Backpack Guides are expected to uphold these principles in their interactions with Backpackers, who may be experiencing difficult economic, psychological or social circumstances.

Regardless of his or her status in your country, a Backpacker must be treated as a human being and an equal. Think how you would want to be treated if the roles were reversed? However, because a Backpacker may have fled his country in fear for his or her life, and have access to very few resources, extra care must be taken to be sure that he or she feels safe, comfortable and respected.

An important idea for human rights is that the physical safety and legal rights of all persons should be protected. This is a concept known in international humanitarian law and practice as protection. In part, protection means that care must be taken that the person in need is not harmed unintentionally when provided with a service or other form of assistance.

The Backpack is a very powerful tool for helping people have access to education. The UN recognizes education as one of the most important ways to protect people from harm and help them build a better future for themselves, their families, and communities. It is designed to provide enhanced protection for all, but especially the most vulnerable because of poverty, war, and being forced to flee their homeland. By empowering young people to connect with education, they can play a central role in securing their own protection.

Protection: A concept that encompasses all activities aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and spirit of human rights, refugee and international humanitarian law. Protection involves creating an environment conducive to respect for human beings, preventing and/or alleviating the immediate effects of a specific pattern of abuse, and restoring dignified conditions of life through repairation, restitution and rehabilitation. (Glossary of Humanitarian Terms – UNOCHA)

Sometimes, a source of protection could also cause problems — for example, if information about the Backpacker was obtained by a person who might want to harm him or her. The danger could come from within the community where the Backpacker lives, or from other communities who might feel angry that the Backpacker is getting access to a service. Danger could also come from the intelligence services in the country of origin, which may be interested in putting pressure on a Backpacker’s relatives who are still inside the country.

While this kind of danger is rare, it is something you as a Guide should be aware of. You must take active steps to protect the Backpacker. For these reasons, all of the information that you will see while helping students access the Backpack is confidential. Confidential means that you may not discuss it with anyone.

It is also critical to understand that as a Backpack Guide, the only help you can offer is related to the student’s academic needs — the storage, processing, and transmitting of academic documentation, statements of purpose and information about educational opportunities.

Key Idea: Keep confidential all information on the documents, forms, or materials you see as you help Backpackers fill their Backpacks. This also includes what they may tell you about themselves or their lives. You are the Backpackers’ trusted partner.

Backpackers may need other forms of assistance for themselves or their families, and you will be provided with information to share with them about non-governmental organizations and other resources that could help solve problems that lie outside the assistance that the Backpack can provide. It may feel hard that you can’t solve all the problems of the Backpackers. It is ok to have these feelings. You should feel free to talk about your feelings and frustration with your Lead Guide or any of the professional educators or NGO workers at the site once you are finished. If you become frustrated or ever find yourself in emotional distress, it is ok to ask for help. You must take proper care of yourself so you can help others.

Key Idea: Guides assist with educational documentation, helping young people learn about educational opportunities and making sure the Backpack works well. Questions and concerns not related to education must be referred to other agencies and organizations.

Know that by helping a student pursue his or her goals, you are helping her or him to participate fully in their own protection. You are helping them tell the world that they have an identity that is more than just that of “refugee,” “displaced person” or “person of concern.”

With these simple and straightforward safeguards in mind, both the Backpackers and the Guides will be safe and able to work together toward securing the human right to education. This work will build pathways towards reconnecting young people like yourself with higher education, academic mobility and employment opportunities.
How to Hold a Backpack Event

While many young people will be able to open and set up a Backpack on their own, many others will need help. One of the strategies to help is to hold a Backpack Event. At a Backpack Event, many young people who could use the Backpack are provided with information about the Backpack, and are invited to bring their documentation to a Backpack Event.

The event should take place in a secure location convenient for the Backpackers, and meet minimum requirements for connectivity. For example: is there wi-fi or 3G available? Can you set up a digital hotspot?

A coordinator will briefly introduce the Backpack, explaining what it can and cannot be used for, and then Backpack Guides (like you!) will each be paired with Backpackers. You will help the Backpackers sign up, show him or her how to upload documents, decide what services might be useful, and discuss possible goals. Some Backpackers will not yet know how they plan to use the Backpack, and that is okay. Some will have clear academic goals, and might need help in accessing credential evaluation services.

All Backpackers should feel good about taking a positive step towards creating their own Backpack, which they can use as they work towards their future.

**Step One:** Publicize the Backpack Event and Prepare Backpackers

Using social media, NGO networks and word of mouth, let potential Backpackers know about the Backpack Event. You can share printed and digital copies of the Backpack comic book, as well. Use this time to make certain that the Backpackers know what they should bring to the event at minimum:

- Working email address
- Copies or original educational documents and certificates
- An idea of educational goals and aspirations, including places they reasonably expect to be able to study
- Copies of résumés or curriculum vitae – they will have an opportunity to upload these documents in English or Arabic, or both.

Also let them know that they will have an opportunity to record a short oral statement of purpose, which we call My Story/My Future

Use Facebook, Eventbrite.com, Doodle.com or a Whatsapp.com group or similar social media to try to schedule participants so they don’t all show up at the same time. It should take around 20 minutes to work with each Backpacker.

When scheduling the event, take into consideration the fact that many Backpackers are working during the week. It might make sense to host the event on a weekend day, or in the evening?

**Step Two:** Arrange the Space

Try to find a space near to where the Backpackers are living, but a place is, at the same time far enough away so people just don’t wander in. University campuses make the ideal location and should be the location of choice. Usually a school room, a camp-based multiuse facility, or even a café could also be reserved for the event.

The space should be safe, comfortable and inviting, and have areas where people can wait separately from where Backpacks are being filled.

Consider using the waiting area as a place where educational NGOs and scholarship agencies could share information about their activities and opportunities.

**Step Three:** Open Backpacks

As a Backpack Guide, you are expected to create your own Backpack before helping others open theirs. Remember: “First a Backpacker, then a Guide.” The best way to teach others how to use it is to use it first yourself. As part of the Guide education process, you will be invited to open your own Backpack and be guided through set-up. Please be prepared to upload documents and make a My Story/My Future recording. Being able to share your Backpack with other Backpackers is key element of establishing trust.

If you still have questions about how to use the Backpack, please refer to the Backpack User Manual.

**Step Four:** Clean Up

Make sure the space you used is clean and ready for school or other events the next day. Pick up any leftover materials and do an inventory of all electronic equipment that you used.

**Step Five:** Evaluation and Follow up

Immediately following the end of a Backpack Event, you should gather with other Guides and administrators and discuss the event. Ask yourself: “What worked?” “What didn’t work?” “What could we do better?” You should also use this time to share any difficult feelings or frustrations you felt as you worked with the Backpackers. It important to reflect on these feelings and not keep them bottled up inside yourself. If you can talk about these issues, you will be a better and more effective guide in the future.

You should also complete any written evaluation provided by administrator teams.
Backpack Guides and My Story/My Future: Coaching Backpackers to Make a Visual and Spoken Statement of Purpose

One of the key components of the Article 26 Backpack is My Story/My Future: it is a way for young people to record, store and share a visual and spoken “statement of purpose.” These are short, 2-4 minute statements made by the Backpackers themselves.

Often young people who have been displaced and have had their education interrupted face real challenges when it comes to writing about their experiences and goals. On the other hand, they may be better able to talk about their past educational and vocational experiences, their recent training and education, and what they hope to study and the careers they plan to pursue. My Story/My Future is a pouch in the Backpack where backpackers can upload a digitally-recorded statement, which is secure, and can be shared with universities, scholarship agencies and employers when they want.

My Story/My Future is important for two other reasons:

Structuring and Imagining a Future – Making a Plan

A good way for young people to organize their goals and plans — and then act — is to talk about what they have done in the past and want to do in the future. Think how you might discuss your goals and plans with your friends and parents and how you use those discussions as a way to fine-tune your educational and vocational choices.

Humanizing Refugee and Vulnerable Young People

Put yourself in the position of a someone making decisions about scholarships or admissions. Now imagine that you have an opportunity to see and listen to someone talk about their accomplishments and ideas for the future? The person becomes more real in the sense that they are more than just a name on a piece of paper. This is also a way to confront prejudice and discrimination against refugee young people.

As a Backpack Guide, you are responsible for helping Backpackers make and upload into the My Story/My Future pouch of the Backpack a visual and oral statement.

Key Idea: The same requirements of confidentiality and respect that apply to documents related to Backpackers’ education also apply to what Backpackers say during My Story/My Future discussion and recording sessions.

Here are some strategies to help Backpackers do the best job possible. You may be in a camp-setting where there are many challenges to recording, but do your best!

- Backpackers should record their My Story/My Future in whichever language they feel most comfortable. However, as a Guide, you should encourage Backpackers to record their statements in English — but you should talk with them first to decide if this is the best way to proceed.

- Find a secure and relatively quiet area. You may never assist the Backpacker record the event in a room with a closed door. This is for safety and personal dignity reasons for both you and the Backpacker. Unfortunately, this might mean that there is more Background noise, consider using a tripod and a small microphone to help improve recording quality. Lead Guides and educators will be able to help.

- Start with a conversation about My Story/My Future. Don’t record anything yet. Tell them about how it could be used and emphasize that nobody will ever see it without their permission. Help the Backpacker organize their thoughts. This might feel uncomfortable at first and the Backpack might even find it funny (as will you!) But this will wear off and you can get down to the work of making a recording. You may want to help the Backpacker run through a series of questions:

  - Where did you start your schooling?
  - What field did you study and why?
  - When did you leave and why?
  - What are your goals for the immediate future and long-term future?
  - Where do you want to study and why; what do you want to study?
Often young people feel a great deal of pressure to study medicine or allied medical fields because of family expectations and the traditional social prestige of medicine in the region (you may have felt this way yourself.) We know that many times, young people want to explore other opportunities, as well. A way to elicit is to ask: What is your second choice for a field of study?

Once you and the Backpacker feel ready to record, do so.

**Give the Backpacker a couple rules:**

1. They have up to four minutes of time. Assure them that they can say a great deal in four minutes. Explain that at three minutes you will hold up a finger, letting them know they have one minute left. At four minutes hold up your hand with a closed fist and the Backpacker must finish. The signal that the Backpacker is done is when they say: “Thank you.”

2. Review the recording with the Backpacker. Because of time constraints, we can’t do re-recordings. However, the Backpacker can upload a new video that they have made on their own at a later date.

3. Help the Backpacker upload the recording. Make certain the recording has uploaded and show the Backpacker how to access it.

**Encourage the Backpacker to talk about leaving their country or other areas of conflict, but not focus on the broad story of war. If they left university because the university was destroyed or they were afraid of violence, they have the human right to tell you that and share that information.**

**My Story/My Future is a fundamental feature of the Backpack Idea. It is a technique to help young people who often have a hard time imagine and plan for their future, take a few moments to think about ways to achieve that future. Remember: Hope is good. Making a plan is better.**
Conclusion

Being a Backpack Guide is an important job. Thank you! It shows that you a person dedicated to promoting and defending human rights for all. You are part of a global team of human rights specialists, software engineers, university professors, and admissions officers dedicated to helping disadvantaged young people have access to higher education, but more important, empowering them to build a better life for themselves, their families and communities.

We hope that being a Backpack Guide will just be one step among many as you build a career in education, social services, public policy or human rights advocacy.

You are also helping these young people know that they are not forgotten.

We ask you to sign and date below acknowledging that you have read this handbook and understand and will fulfill your responsibilities as a Backpack Guide — including your important role in protecting Backpackers’ rights and safety.

__________________________
Signature of Guide, Print Name, and Date

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Signature of Article 26 Backpack Directorate Representative, Print Name and Date

Please feel free to connect with the Backpack Directorate at Article26Backpack@ucdavis.edu with questions and concerns.