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## History

The global economy has provided opportunity and affluence for those that can tap into it, but for many, opportunity remains out of reach due to infrastructural gaps and access to resources and information. As a result, we are witnesses to a growing disparity of wealth, quality of health and education. The disparity is most extreme in developing countries, where limited infrastructure perpetuates a seemingly endless cycle of poverty, hunger and lack of health care. The time has come to respond and empower individuals to reach across the chasm and improve the quality of life for all members of our global community.

In response to this need, [Global Brigades, Inc.](http://www.globalbrigades.org), has ignited the largest student-led global health and sustainable development movement on the planet; with the mission to empower students to facilitate solutions in developing countries while respecting local cultures and improving the environment.

Global Brigades offers a holistic model of sustainable development through a multi-disciplinary grassroots network of more than 2,000 annual volunteers who travel overseas to help. Current programs include: medical, dental, public health, water sanitation, legal assistance, micro-enterprise development, architecture and environmental preservation.

Global Brigades' programming creates a mutually beneficial exchange that improves quality of life for disadvantaged people in the developing world, and empowers the students and professionals who initiate the programs. Global Brigades' directors and advisors work consistently with each student leader to share knowledge, develop leadership skills and ensure the programming is implemented effectively. We also maintain offices in the regions where our programs are established to ensure continuity of our programs by building and maintaining long-



term relationships with the communities we serve and the organizations, universities and governments we collaborate with.

The engine behind Global Brigades is the university club operated by the student leaders. Each club acts as an autonomous group with their own constitution, organizational structure, and bank account. Student leaders either establish a new club on their campus to carry out the Global Brigades mission or combine the programming with an existing club.

Global Brigades began with one program, [Global Medical Brigades](#) (GMB), a secular, international network of university clubs that travel to developing countries to provide health care in communities without regular access otherwise. GMB evolved out of a long-standing relationship with one of Honduras' most reputable nonprofit organizations, Sociedad Amigos de los Niños (SAN). Since 1966, SAN has operated orphanages, health care facilities and schools for some of the most in-need and neglected Hondurans. In the last 40 years, founder, Sister Maria Rosa Legol, is said to have raised more than 40,000 orphaned or abandoned children.

Throughout SAN's history, they've been called upon to provide health care relief in rural villages. The need for this escalated in 1998, when Hurricane Mitch ravaged Central America killing more than 12,000 and displacing tens of thousands. With the tremendous need for medicine, more and more U.S. groups traveled to the region to provide humanitarian aid in conjunction with SAN.

Of these groups a number of college students joined to help in the effort, but no formal program existed for them to lead their own brigades or carry out long-term programming in the villages they served. This changed in 2003, when an inspired group of students from Marquette University returned from a medical brigade with a Wisconsin church and created a club on their campus to perpetuate a program of international health relief. That year, the group led two



medical brigades treating more than 3,000 patients and laid the foundation for Global Brigades' programming.

Through 2004-2005, members of what would become the Board of Directors of Global Brigades, worked with SAN to establish an official medical brigade department to develop sustainable programming tailored for university students to implement. They formalized processes for needs assessments, established relationships with permanent clinics to sponsor referrals for patients with needs beyond the capacity of the brigade, developed a patient records system to monitor health trends, and broadened its mission to also improve the water, sanitation, and overall public health infrastructure.

Meanwhile, in North America, the grass roots movement was spreading and other universities started adopting the GMB program. By the end of 2005, the University of Michigan and University of Southern California established GMB clubs. In 2006, GMB partnered with graduate school advising company Inquarta to further expand programming on other college campuses. Also, in 2006, GMB launched a website to help scale their growth and provide students with the tools, information and resources needed to lead their own brigade.

In 2007, GMB officially spun-off from the medical brigade department of Sociedad Amigos de los Niños and formalized the U.S. entity, Global Brigades, Inc. and developed an autonomous Board of Directors. This shift also represented a movement towards a holistic service model, expanding its scope of opportunities beyond medical relief to include business, water, architecture, law and environmental programs.

The first of these programs to be implemented was [Global Business Brigades](#) (GBB). Conceptualized and piloted in spring 2007, GBB brought together students and micro-entrepreneurs in developing countries to create sustainable and innovative economic



opportunities. University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) students were the first to launch a business brigade in summer of '07 and adopted a community of coffee farmers in El Chile, Honduras. By 2008, the UCLA GBB club had over 100 members, implemented four brigades, formalized a coffee co-op, built a community storage bodega, and created a single point of sale and identified North American buyers. In early 2008, GBB expanded operations into Panama to reach poverty-stricken regions that remain outside of Panama City's economic thoroughfare.

Since its inception, GBB has worked with numerous indigenous and low-income communities in Panama and Honduras to empower, educate and stimulate villagers to create their own economic future. Through GBB's business consulting model, students received hands-on business experience and an opportunity to make a difference. To ensure all projects are culturally appropriate and sustainable in the long-term, GBB has partnered with world-class organizations such as the US Peace Corps, Earth Train and Red Cross. In this collaborative environment, GBB volunteers supports existing partner projects to contribute funding, labor, and most importantly new ideas.

Global Business Brigades now can be found under the "Development Brigades" umbrella to incorporate several of Global Brigades newest programs: Law, Architecture and Environmental Brigades. By offering in-need communities access to critical law resources, sustainable design and construction and environmental education and services, the Global Development arm of Global Brigades works to create a more comprehensive and holistic approach to sustainable development.

From 2007 to 2009, Global Brigades expanded its holistic approach to supplement Medical to create an overall Health Brigades arm, that includes Dental, Water and Public Health Brigades. The Water Brigades are implemented in conjunction with the Honduran government, designing



full-scale water projects and breaking them up into one-week projects for our volunteers to implement. Because of the wide-spread expansion of Water Brigades, the chapters are able to systematically complete full-scale projects as clubs rotate into communities. In addition, Public Health Brigades are implemented to strengthen the health infrastructure in communities by working with community members to build eco-stoves, latrines and more sanitary water storage units in the homes. The program is complimented with a public health education piece on the medical brigade for an integrated and preventative health service model.

Since 2008, it has been our mission for every university to have each of these programs to offer a multi-disciplinary international service program for nearly any of its students. To expand these initiatives, our Board of Directors, began visiting all of the university campuses that have a Global Brigades club. The programs have been very well received and universities have adopted the holistic approach.

In just a few short years, the ambition of that one team of Marquette University volunteers has spread to nearly 80 campuses in both the U.S. and Canada with more than 2,000 annual volunteers serving more than 100,000 beneficiaries throughout Central America, Ghana, Vietnam, and India.

We were proud to announce in March 2009, that three of the members of the original leadership team will be coming on full-time to help take Global Brigades to the next level and provide more of the much-needed infrastructural support on the U.S. side of our operations. We are even prouder to say that we did not have to raise any of the volunteer program costs and in fact, are striving to lower costs with supplemental grants by 2010. From 2004 through 2008, our entire North American leadership team served as volunteers in addition to having full-time employment.



Global Brigades offers donors and grant makers a unique opportunity to make a tangible difference in some of the world's most in-need communities without any additional overhead costs. Global Brigades will match donors with volunteers already traveling to these communities to implement sustainable health and development solutions and is staffed with year-round volunteers to monitor the progress of the projects. Since our volunteer model has a built-in operational margin, any donations or grants given to our national nonprofit can go straight into the community project. For more information on how to leverage our widespread network of volunteers to advance/support your health and development objectives, please contact Steve Atamian at [steve@globalbrigades.org](mailto:steve@globalbrigades.org).

For more information on the long term strategies of Global Brigades and partnership opportunities, please contact Steve Atamian at [steve@globalbrigades.org](mailto:steve@globalbrigades.org).