The program outlined in this document is subject to change according to practical realities within China as well as the particular interests of participants. This flexibility allows the Bridge Year cohort to move at its own pace, to be responsive to personal and group interests, and to take advantage of the learning opportunities that result from unexpected events.
Novogratz Bridge Year Program in China

*in partnership with Where There Be Dragons*

Participants in China engage in service assignments primarily in the large and rapidly expanding city of Kunming, the provincial capital of Yunnan province. Located at the foothills of the Himalaya, just north of the jungles of Southeast Asia, Yunnan is renowned for its idyllic Chinese countryside, stunning gorges and rich biodiversity. Yunnan is also one of China’s most ethnically diverse regions, home to 26 nationally recognized ethnic groups. Due in part to its reputation for openness along with the social and economic challenges in the western regions, Kunming has recently become the base for many domestic and international non-governmental organizations. This backdrop provides program participants an ideal venue from which to explore China’s rich cultural diversity and unique history, as well as some of the nation’s most prevalent social, economic and environmental issues.

**Arrival and Orientation**

Soon after Bridge Year volunteers fly into Kunming, they travel by overnight bus to the quiet, tranquil mountain temple of Shibaoshan for an immediate and full immersion into Chinese and local ethnic Bai culture. After two days of living in the temple, participants descend through the valley to the traditional village of Shaxi for a five-day orientation to the program. Shaxi, formerly a bustling hub on the Ancient Tea Horse Road, provides a glimpse into daily life in rural China while offering comfortable facilities, cool temperatures, a languid pace, and panoramic mountain views. In between orientation activities and workshops, participants can explore historic sites, barter for items at the local market, search for *matsutake* mushrooms with local ethnic Bai residents, take bike rides through the valley, and hike to remote mountain villages.
Cultural and Service Learning – Fall

Participants spend September traveling around the ecologically and ethnologically diverse rural landscapes of Yunnan. Students live among the Naxi people, near Lijiang, while reflecting with Bridge Year staff on the meaning of “Learning Service.” The group traverses the wilderness of either Laojunshan National Park or the breathtaking Tiger Leaping Gorge while building group dynamics and cohesion. The month culminates in a two-week rural homestay in the tea-growing mountain communities of Lincang. Here, volunteers live and work with the families, harvesting tea leaves, peanuts, corn and other local crops.

Villages in Lincang Prefecture often suffer from a lack of basic infrastructure, such as latrines, animal corrals, water filtration systems, and waste disposal. Our partner organization works with local villages to provide basic infrastructure and education that is geographically and culturally appropriate. Students work with villagers to discuss plans for project development and implementation before physically contributing to a project. Projects emphasize volunteers’ relationships with the host community, stressing collaboration and common goals. Volunteers develop a sense of the community’s needs, and how their own skills can be best integrated, by working alongside villagers and participating in lessons on the local and international history of development and service.

During this time, Bridge Year volunteers also begin Mandarin instruction and participate in a variety of discussions and presentations on themes related to village life in China, civic engagement, the rural/urban divide, and sustainable development.

Arrival in Kunming

Bridge Year volunteers arrive in Kunming in early October and begin another five-day orientation designed to help participants navigate what can be a complex and confusing urban landscape. Orientation provides students with a thorough introduction to the city and all that it has to offer, as well as the practical skills required to find their way around, integrate themselves into local culture, and thrive in their individual service placements.
Homestay

Program participants live with families in an area of Kunming surrounding Green Lake and several major universities. The homestay experience provides students with a unique opportunity to practice language skills, establish deep relationships, and integrate more fully into local society. Participants can expect comfortable but modest accommodations. One volunteer is placed in each home, generally within a small close-knit family unit. Each participant can expect to have his or her own bedroom, furnished with a twin bed, a desk, a chair, and a dresser or place to store clothing. Most meals are prepared and shared with the homestay family.

Past participants have advised that while the homestay might be one of the most challenging program elements, with patience and persistence, the relationships built can often become one of the most rewarding aspects of Bridge Year. Homestay placements are carefully organized with each participant's individual personality and needs in mind in order to provide the best language exchange and cultural immersion experience possible.

Language Instruction

From October through November, Bridge Year participants receive two to three hours of intensive Mandarin language training each day. Classes are taught by university-trained language instructors in small, individualized classes. One-on-one tutoring is also available to anyone in need of extra attention. From December through March, language classes continue
but with fewer classroom hours that are catered to participants’ individual needs. Continued language mentoring is available to students for the full duration of the program in Kunming. Mandarin is a notoriously difficult language to learn. However, with hard work, support from Bridge Year staff, and extensive immersion into host families and service organizations, participants can expect to gain conversational fluency within three to four months.

**Community Service Placements**

Participants spend six to eight hours per day, four to five days per week, at their service assignment. Travel to and from the service site depends on the assignment, but can range from a 15-minute walk to an hour-long bus ride. Many participants choose to join the local masses and make this commute on bicycle, enjoying Kunming’s beautiful weather and bustling street life. On-site staff orient students to their respective assignments and provide continuous support throughout the program. Below is a list of host organizations in Kunming and potential service assignments.

**Operation Smile** ([www.operationsmile.org/](http://www.operationsmile.org/)) is an international charity providing much needed surgical services. Since 1982, Operation Smile has provided more than two million patient evaluations and over 200,000 free surgeries for children and young adults born with cleft lips, cleft palates and other facial deformities. Projects depend on the volunteer’s interest and skill set, but activities may include supporting medical staff both in Kunming and in the field, creating awareness programs in schools, and conducting research.

**PEAC** ([panchina.org/en_index.aspx](http://panchina.org/en_index.aspx)) is a small, friendly environmental advocacy NGO staffed by Chinese locals. It brings rural farmers, urban residents, and government officials together to spread awareness of the risks that chemical pesticides pose to personal health and the environment. PEAC is one of few NGOs in China concerned with pesticide risk advocacy, and its website is the only one in China devoted entirely to public education concerning environmental and public health issues. Projects depend on the volunteer’s interests and skill set, and can include teaching English to staff and local children on relevant environmental topics, translation, website maintenance, work in rural minority villages, and policy advocacy.

**Daytop** is a treatment center for drug users in Kunming that uses a North American model of “therapeutic community” treatment. In addition to treating drug abuse, Daytop also provides needle exchange, methadone therapy, peer education, HIV testing, and counseling.
Projects depend on the volunteer’s interest and skill set, but may include direct interaction with Daytop participants in workshops and group therapy, English training for Daytop staff, and further program development.

**Xin Tiandi Mental Illness Association** works to provide services and teach life skills to people in Kunming with developmental disabilities and to demonstrate that people with mental illness can successfully participate in society through education, employment and other social activities. Xin Tiandi offers people who suffer from mental illness opportunities to participate in improving their own health by working and socializing together in a safe and welcoming environment. The facility provides art and computer centers and includes a kitchen, dining room, and classroom. Volunteers are encouraged to bring their own high energy and individual passions to interact with members of the community it serves. Specific volunteer opportunities include teaching English, computer skills, and handicrafts, as well as simply offering gentle companionship.

**Village Progress (VP)** ([www.villageprogress.com](http://www.villageprogress.com)) is a non-profit organization that serves rural villages and underprivileged urban migrant schools through participatory development programs that improve village conservation, health and education. By working closely with migrant children and their families, VP serves as a gateway for these children to adapt to urban life. VP works with a number of NGOs and migrant schools in the region, holding various educational activities and projects for children in areas with few opportunities. Volunteers work mainly on project development, website development, and/or outreach.

**Concordia Welfare and Education Foundation (CWEF)** ([www.cwef.org.hk](http://www.cwef.org.hk)) is a faith-based non-profit organization that is dedicated to improving the lives of impoverished rural communities in Asia through education and service. CWEF focuses primarily in the education and health sectors and works directly with villages and organizations around Yunnan to identify sources of poverty and implement sustainable programs. Volunteers at this site placement work closely with development projects in the education and health departments depending on their specific skill set.

**Eco-Women** ([http://www.ecowomen.cn/en_index.aspx](http://www.ecowomen.cn/en_index.aspx)) is a rapidly growing environmental NGO that works to combat pesticide use in China by working with and empowering the women who do most of the farming in rural China. Eco-Women focuses on broader action in the villages where it operates, bringing about community-wide change by targeting key female leaders. Strategies include teaching farmers about health and the best
methods for organic farming, and helping them sell their goods directly to consumers in cities. Eco-Women has also been focusing on other issues such as encouraging women to preserve traditional customs as well as increase awareness on domestic violence. Work depends on the interests of volunteers and can include translation, fundraising, teaching, and researching environmental and women’s issues.

**Green Watershed** (http://www.chinagreenwatershed.org/) is an environmental NGO that focuses on participatory watershed management as well as mitigating the environmental and social impacts of dams and other large infrastructure projects. This NGO was established in 2000, making it one of the oldest NGOs in Yunnan province. It is also one of the few NGOs working on issues related to the Mekong River and Salween River. Green Watershed does research, advocacy, training, and field project implementation. Though work may vary, a volunteer here would likely do office work such as translation and research.

**Program House**

The China Novogratz Bridge Year Program House is located in Kunming's Hong Shan neighborhood just west of Green Lake. Situated within the city's bustling university district, the program house is located near homestay placements and provides volunteers with a place to meet with on-site staff, gather to cook and share meals, relax, and host guest speakers and performances. It has two classrooms, a large kitchen, library, lounge area, office, and a small balcony overlooking the city, as well as internet access for volunteer use. There are a host of eateries, cafes and markets within walking distance.

**Cultural Enrichment Activities**

The following activities are incorporated into the Novogratz Bridge Year Program in order to impart important context to both service work, as well as the overall cultural experience in China.

**Guest Speakers:** Over the course of the program guest lecturers and local experts are invited to discuss and present on a range of topics including Chinese history, modern China, religion, demography and migration, ethnicity and cultural identity, geography and biodiversity, economy, philosophy, gender issues, urbanization, the arts, conservation, current events, and political theory.

**Excursions:** Bridge Year participants also partake in four program-sponsored excursions beyond Kunming. Destinations depend on many factors including weather, time constraints, festivals, student interest, and relevance to the overall program. Due to the immense cultural and social bounty that exists in Yunnan, a host of options are available. Possible destinations include sacred Meili Xue Shan on the Yunnan-Tibet border; tropical Xishuangbanna; the spectacular Yuanyang rice terraces built more than 1,300 years ago by the ethnic Hani people; Weibao Shan's Buddhist grottoes near Shaxi; cultural and historical sites in Sichuan such as Leshan and Emei Shan; trekking in the Nujiang Valley or inimitable Tiger Leaping Gorge; the renowned tea-growing regions around Pu'er. To the greatest extent possible, participants are given ownership over research, planning and logistical management for these group expeditions.
Mid-Course Retreat: The midpoint of the program roughly correlates with China’s most important holiday, the Chinese New Year. Every year a mass exodus of families return to their ancestral villages across China. Accompanied by Bridge Year staff, participants travel to a community outside of picturesque Lijiang to spend this one-week holiday with families of the Naxi ethnic minority. Here participants experience the rich traditions of the family-focused holiday in a vibrant rural community. After the festivities, the group takes advantage of the idyllic landscape to reflect on the first half of the program, while simultaneously looking forward to the activities and opportunities still to come.

Independent Enrichment Activities: Bridge Year participants have the opportunity to engage in one-on-one mentorships or Independent Enrichment Activities in a subject of interest. Topics may include Chinese calligraphy, Daoism, martial arts, tea ceremony, ink painting, gender issues, traditional Chinese medicine, traditional Chinese games, Guzheng (a Chinese string instrument), bamboo flute, table tennis, jewelry making, Chinese cooking, and meditation. The activity may directly enrich the participant’s service assignment or serve to enhance an understanding and appreciation of China and Chinese culture.

Student-led Spring Excursion

During late spring, participants use their newly-acquired expertise to plan and execute a multiple week excursion with their instructors in tow. Where in China students choose to go is dependent on participants’ interests, but past groups have spent time in Sichuan, Gansu,
Guizhou, Guangxi, Qinghai, and Xinjiang Provinces, and have engaged in a variety of activities, including rural homestays, service learning, meetings with local organizations, and trekking.

**Program Wrap-up**

During the final week in China, Bridge Year students travel to a retreat center on the Tibetan Plateau. Here, volunteers will participate in a transference workshop where they will be prompted to identify, examine, and assimilate the lessons learned from their experience. They will also have an opportunity to reflect on their return home, their goals for the future, and the ways in which they can best integrate their experience into daily life at Princeton.