

## Section I: Narrative

### 1. **A two-sentence summary of the goals of your project.**

The project aimed to teach young adults how to use creative writing and photography as a form of expression while developing their technical abilities, especially those which involve the utilization of modern equipment. Additionally, it aimed to intertwine the arts and the use of technology (such as digital cameras, computers, audio recording equipment), towards the larger aim of breaking down the communication barriers between different communities.

### 2. **Did other fund-raising efforts contribute to your project? What were they?**

Most of the expenses were covered by the grant. In some cases, I used personal money in order to keep the costs as low as possible and maximize the use of money for organizing the project.

### 3. **How did you come up with the idea for your project?**

After many weeks of discussing what Song Eraou – the Malaysian volunteer team member – and I would be doing over the summer, we thought that an educational project would be beneficial. Both of us have been passionate about arts and their importance in our daily lives. We used arts to describe our cultures to each other, bridging the gap that existed between a Romanian and a Malaysian. She showed me photos of back home and through the use of poems, she expressed the struggle of understanding and accepting each other. Motivated to change this, we searched for ways to achieve peace and understanding between communities. Seeing that sharing arts established cultural understanding between us, we thought that it could work in a Malaysian community as well.

### 4. **Why do you think the issue your project is responding to exists?**

After a summer spent in Malaysia, I can say that the understanding and communication gap exists because the voices of certain groups have been neglected. While the cities have prospered from strong economic development, the villages, where the native people live, get little attention. In this manner, the narrative presented by the town people seemed to be the only valid one. The native groups are often ignored, resulting in fewer possibilities for expressing their ideas, struggles and voices.

### 5. **Why did you choose your host site to work in?**

For 2019, I decided with Song that we should organize two projects - one in Romania, and one in Malaysia. We wanted to understand each other's cultures better and to see how we could relate our own stories and struggles to each other's. In March, we organized a Project Week with the help of UWC Adriatic in Bucharest where we worked with disadvantaged kids from Bucharest. For the summer, Malaysia was the host site. Deciding which part of Malaysia was not difficult. Song comes from Kuching, Sarawak, and she thought that it would be better to have the project there, rather than in West Malaysia. One of the reasons is that she could relate better to the people of this area, while also overcoming the language barrier. Additionally, coming from this area, she felt a level of duty to offer something back to the place in which she grew up.

### 6. **What was it like to work in your host site?**

I adapted quickly and for Song it was like second nature, being born and raised there. I was welcomed with warmth, passion and curiosity for learning from all the children. The barriers that we thought might exist between us – language, culture, preferences – were immediately put down, when conversation started.

### 7. **Did you feel at any point that the project was not going to work? In what ways?**

Our curriculum was initially designed solely for middle-schools. We thought that it could easily work as well for the primary-school students, but this proved to be wrong. The expectations that we had created initially had to be adjusted, because of the barriers of language and knowledge. While with the middle-school students we were able to discuss poems addressing the topics of sexism and racism, with primary-school ones, we had to focus on more simple ideas, at times even teach English rules. For the photography part, the curriculum was adapted after we saw that trying to squeeze as many abstract concepts as possible in three hours, did not give any feasible results. We have

discussed and have taken the received feedback into consideration, in order to make it better for future participants.

**8. What were the challenges you encountered in communicating with people?**

Most of the communication challenges came from working with primary schools (SKs), because of my little understanding of Malaysian/local language. While we used English as the language of instruction, not many of the children were fluent or close to a level of proficiency. Song was there to help and to translate the concepts that were not understood by the students. When facing difficulties, we would slow down and focus more on visual language, rather than on English.

**9. How do you define peace?**

For me, peace represents an ideal worth fighting for. Peace represents understanding, tolerance and acceptance of each other, regardless of our differences. While some differences are positive, and others can cause harm, I believe that education can help us diminish the harm-producing ones. Peace represents not only a state-of-being of a community, but also an individual state-of-mind, that is expressed through empathy, acceptance and understanding of each other.

**10. How does or will your project contribute to peace? Short-term? Long-term?**

First, the students that we have taught will spread the message even further. They will apply critical and creative thinking in their future projects, as well in a day-to-day basis. The art that they created is on display in each of the schools where we have worked, showcasing ideas of understanding and acceptance to anyone that passes by. In the long-term, the online platform is available for them to share through art their feelings and struggles that they are experiencing. This will allow a greater audience to witness and understand their narrative of events.

Secondly, the schools and instructors with whom we have worked have received instructions from us, as well. They have witnessed the educational process and the methods that we are using in order to get the students to create meaningful and impactful art. The schools will use the equipment that we have donated in order to continue the art-creating process. In schools, such as SK St. Giles and SK Sacred Heart, where a photography/art club was not present, we helped create and start one. This will allow the schools to offer students a place to create and share art with each other and with the outside communities.

Thirdly, the project made us, the organizers, more aware of the different narratives that exist in the Malaysian community.

**11. Has your project changed the way you think about the world? How has it changed you?**

The project allowed me to better understand different teaching practices that are used to create connections between people of various backgrounds. Additionally, it offered me a better understanding of the students' lives, how they spend their days, their passions and desires for the future. What in the beginning seemed to be so different, proved to be more similar to Romania. When they were telling me about the video games that they play or about their desire to be listened to and understood, I felt like I could relate to them. This allowed me to see that even if the world seems so big and different, in fact there are many similarities between our cultures. Even if some borders separate us, this does not mean that there aren't ways in which we can understand each other and offer communication amongst the communities.

The project helped me understand better how I can make deeper and more durable connections with people from different cultures. It offered me a way of respectfully understanding their culture, while sharing bits of mine. Additionally, I have learned how to organize and run a project. Starting with the planning process, to the implementation phase, everything was a learning curve that helped me understand what effort it takes to get an initiative running.

Push the Boundaries: Artistic Empowerment Program for Sarawakian Youth in Malaysia  
Malaysia | Bowdoin College  
Radu Stochita – Romania – Bowdoin College 2022 – UWC Adriatic 2018 – **Project Leader**  
Song Eraou – Malaysia – Bowdoin College 2023 – UWC Adriatic 2019 – **Volunteer Team Member**  
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**12. Please provide a 1-2 personal statement sentence, suitable for use as a quotation, addressing how and why this project was valuable and what was the most important thing you learned as a result. Indicate the student's name (yours or your teammate's) for quote attribution.**

The barriers that were existent before started shattering bit by bit as we all realized that we have more in common with each other than we initially thought. The project in Malaysia allowed us to search for unity, cooperation and communication between communities that in the beginning were perceived as separated and uncooperative. (Radu Stochita)

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## Section II: Photographs

