



# **2012 Work Group Volunteer Packet**

*For Groups Traveling to Nicaragua and/or El Salvador*

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## General Volunteer Information

Thank you for your interest in Seeds of Learning's work group program. We hope that you will become a part of SOL's family of over 2,400 work group volunteers who have traveled to Central America and helped to enrich the future through education in North and Central America.

Please carefully read and review all of the information in this *2012 SOL Work Group Volunteer Packet*, and be sure to bring it with you to all work group pre-departure meetings along with a *SOL Education Packet* in order to begin learning more about Central America's geography, history, politics, economics, culture, and society. In the meantime, if you have any questions after reading the information contained in this packet, please do not hesitate to contact the Seeds of Learning US office or your work group leader.

### Application Due Dates

Each SOL work group volunteer *must* complete and return a *SOL Work Group Application, Medical Waiver and Liability Release* form. All volunteers under the age of 18 must return the *Minor Permission Release*, and volunteers under the age of 16 who are traveling without a parent must complete the *Minor Permission* form as well as complete and have notarized, the *Guardianship Form*. Please refer to the timeline below and *Work Group Pricing, Deposit, and Cancellation Policies* for all due dates. All participants traveling in closed or open-focused groups should return the appropriate forms and payments to their work group leader, who in turn sends them to the SOL office. Participants traveling in open groups should contact the SOL office directly.

#### Due At least 90 days prior to group departure

- SOL Work Group Volunteer Application, Medical Waiver, and Liability Release*
- \$600 deposit
- Copy of the front page of your passport. If you don't already have a valid passport (which needs to be valid for at least 6 months after your departure date), start the process ASAP (before 90 days)!
- Minor Permission Release* (for all youth under 18)
- SOL Guardianship Form* (for minors under 16 years of age and traveling without a parent)

#### Due at least 60 days before departure

- \$700 or remaining balance (this amount may differ depending on group type and length)

#### Due at least 30 days before departure

- Airfare payment (please note that taxes on the airline ticket cannot be guaranteed until the ticket is emitted).
- Make sure you have your Hepatitis A or immune globulin shot (required), and any other optional vaccinations or preventative medicines you have chosen to take (see *Health and Safety Guidelines* on page 10-11). Also, be sure you have a supply of all prescription medications you will need during the entire trip.



## History of Seeds of Learning

In response to the need for solidarity, education, and peaceful reconstruction after the decade long civil war in Nicaragua, in 1988, Todd Evans and Patrick Rickon participated in a Habitat for Humanity project to help build houses near Ciudad Darío, Nicaragua. On subsequent trips to Nicaragua, Patrick and Todd were deeply touched by the hope still alive in the poverty stricken region. Observing the basic need for school desks and education resources, they decided to work together to respond to the need. Todd organized support and the collection of educational materials in the States, while Patrick worked with local community members to build rustic school desks out of scrap lumber from a Habitat for Humanity saw mill.

As the demand from surrounding communities for school desks increased, so did Patrick and Todd's resolve to work longer-term in the area. Nicaraguan children, who previously sat on a dirt floor or a wooden stump at school, now had a desk. Local community members were able to participate in the construction of the desks as well, empowering them to become active participants in the development of their own communities.

As the wave of new school desks spread throughout the communities in the area, soon the need for schools became apparent as well. While Todd established the support base and infrastructure of the organization in Ukiah, California, Patrick continued to work with local Nicaraguans to respond to locally defined education needs.

In 1991, SOL became an official nonprofit organization dedicated to enriching the future through education in the Americas. As the interest in supporting work in Nicaragua grew, so did SOL, enabling it to reach a wider range of education needs in Nicaragua. Soon, through generous donations of additional woodworking equipment, SOL's woodshop was able to furnish even more school desks before growing out of its quarters. At this time, SOL also collaborated with Swedish and Nicaraguan volunteers on an adult education and literacy initiative, organizing adult literacy classes and supporting rural communities' efforts to eradicate illiteracy.

Meanwhile, in California, SOL continued to attract the attention of a wider population of youth, church members, and other interested parties. During the summer of 1992, twenty-one volunteers from Mendocino, California traveled to Nicaragua, to work together with community members of Playa de Moyua to build a one-classroom school. The success of this endeavor helped to establish SOL's school construction and work group programs. In that same year, seven schools in Northern California commenced correspondence with schools in Nicaragua, and the sister school program began. Today there are over 2,000 students and 80 teachers involved in the sister school program, exchanging letters, artwork, and cultural traditions throughout the year.

Although SOL increasingly provided the means for people in local communities in the Darío area to pursue education, other needs continued to present themselves, especially in the area of education resources. Following a community survey, in 1995, a pilot Learning Resource Center was opened. Although the center opened with just a few bookshelves of donated puzzles and storybooks, the response in Darío was astounding. Children, youth, and teachers, alike lined up around the block to wait for a chance to put together puzzles, read, or just marvel at the brightly colored storybooks. As the center continued to grow, twice it moved to larger facilities. Soon, responding to the popular demand of high school students for a library with up to date reference and literature books, atlases, and dictionaries, SOL added a reference area to the LRC. Before long, guitar classes were offered, followed by sewing, embroidery, art, dance, and other music classes. Today the center is a popular hub of educational and



cultural activity in Darío. It attracts students, teachers, ministry of education and local government officials, as well as community members interested in learning a new skill or in using the many resources in the center.

Deterred by the high cost of school uniforms, transportation, tuition, tests, and books, few students are able to complete primary, let alone, high school in Nicaragua. Beginning in 1996, SOL established a scholarship program, which today supports over 100 primary, secondary, and university students in Latin America. From its inception to the present time, SOL has given over 900 scholarships to students in Nicaragua and El Salvador.

Responding to the destruction caused by major natural disasters in Central America, SOL changed the focus of its work temporarily in order to help provide disaster relief. In 1999, following the devastation of Hurricane Mitch in Nicaragua, staff and volunteers collaborated with several national and international relief organizations to build over 200 houses for families who lost their homes in and around Darío. In El Salvador, SOL staff also collaborated with local community and US volunteers to rebuild a water system and schools damaged by the 2001 earthquakes.

In 1999, responding to the invitation of the small post-war resettlement community of Las Minas, El Salvador, SOL began a school construction project. Finding needs similar to those in Nicaragua for rural schools and community development, SOL began working with local volunteer community members to establish school construction, sister school, and scholarship programs in El Salvador. After two successful years of implementing the high school scholarship program, and seeing the still very limited employment options after high school, in 2002, SOL developed a university scholarship program and began supporting four university scholarship students who were interested, committed, and passionate about the pursuit of higher education.

Today, approximately 300 volunteers from all over North America participate in SOL's work group program each year. Together, USA volunteers and community members have built 120 classrooms in 48 schools in the past 21 years, benefiting over 6,000 students.

By becoming a Seeds of Learning work group volunteer, individuals become a part of the SOL family, which supports thousands of students, teachers, and community members whose lives are affected by SOL's programs both in the United States and abroad. They also gain a wealth of knowledge and increased understanding about the social, economic, and political realities facing developing countries of the Americas.

In response to the need for increased job skills in a still poverty stricken region, SOL is looking towards the development of a vocational education training program in order to continue to help improve the quality of life for rural Central Americans. Through this initiative and its other education programs, SOL continues to enrich the lives of many through education in the Americas.



## Work Group Guidelines – Nicaragua and El Salvador

**Purpose:** This 1-2 week work group is designed to provide an opportunity for North American volunteers to actively participate in a service project, and learn about the culture of rural communities in Latin America. The emphasis is on building bridges of friendship and cross-cultural understanding with Nicaraguans and/or Salvadorans in the places where we work. We hope to inspire you to become even more service based in your own community as you strengthen your identity as a global citizen. The group will work with staff and community volunteers to build or repair a school. Participants bring skills, resources, encouragement, and open minds, which can vastly improve their own experience and understanding as well as the educational opportunity for Central American communities.

**Education:** An integral part of the work group experience takes place in the four group meetings prior to leaving for Central America. In each of these meetings, using the *SOL Education Packet*, volunteers will learn about the geography, history, politics, economics, arts, culture, and society of the region(s) they are visiting. They will also get to know the other group members and review the logistics and plan for the trip together. Volunteers should make it a priority to attend all four meetings. *SOL requires that work group volunteers attend at least three of the pre-departure meetings, and strongly recommends volunteers to attend all four.* We also strongly encourage volunteers to educate themselves about the country as much as possible ahead of time in order to enrich their experience. Through group discussions, talks with local leaders, and excursions while in Central America, volunteers will have the chance to revisit the themes they discussed in the US.

**The Project:** Seeds of Learning has been working in Nicaragua since 1991. Projects have included building school furniture, adult education, literacy programs, school buildings, a Learning Resource Center (LRC), and a Satellite LRC. SOL expanded its school construction and work group programs to El Salvador in 1999.

In both Nicaragua and El Salvador, volunteers of all skill levels can contribute to the work. In Nicaragua, we build reinforced brick buildings with metal roofs. In El Salvador, we build reinforced concrete block buildings with tile floors and panelized roofs. Volunteers move dirt, sift sand, mix cement, carry blocks, fill joints with mortar, bend rebar, help put on the roof, and perhaps paint. This can be strenuous, yet rewarding work. Volunteers work under the direction of an experienced construction supervisor who directs volunteers and community members in their activities. In addition to construction work, volunteers have various opportunities to interact with adults and youth from the community, to play games, read books, practice their Spanish, or informally teach English.

SOL only works in communities where we have been invited to help. Our philosophy of community development is one of mutual cooperation and solidarity. The community begins the process of construction on the school with SOL staff well before work groups arrive. Usually it takes several groups over the course of a year to complete a school. One group may help to lay the foundation, while others work on the walls, floors, roof, doors and/or windows.

There are many education programs in Nicaragua outside of just school building, the most visible one being SOL's LRC in Ciudad Darío. The LRC is a center of cultural and educational activities for hundreds of people in and around Darío. Classes in handicrafts, dancing, music and sewing are offered,



as well as tutoring and library services to children, youth and adults. Some US volunteers spend some or all of their time assisting and doing special projects in the LRC rather than on construction. If you have any ideas for possible projects or activities that you might like to engage in, please call the office to further discuss the feasibility.

**Climate:** In Nicaragua and El Salvador, the weather is roughly similar to that of California's central valley, with highs in the 90s and often muggy and very hot. Evenings may be warm or cool. March and April are very hot and dry. The rainy season runs May to September -- afternoon rains may bring a slight cooling. Be prepared to work in mud. Some participants bring rain gear in this season, while others prefer to get wet (and stay a little cooler).

**Accommodations and Work Conditions:** Volunteers should know before they go: this will be a RUSTIC experience. Volunteers stay in the hostel style rooms or a rustic retreat center or hotel, often with shared rooms and bunk beds for 2-8 people. Expect, running water and electricity that can go out at times and possibly some group cooking facilities.

Volunteers should expect to be exposed to rustic conditions not unlike a camping trip. Do not expect hot showers in either country. Expect to use a latrine at the work site. Persons who have a low tolerance for dirt, roosters crowing at night, close-quarter living or lack of privacy may not want to make this trip. SOL encourages interested volunteers to talk with former SOL work group volunteers for more first hand experience. We also encourage participants to personally reflect on how they will respond to the rustic conditions. Please feel free to ask the SOL office for names of previous volunteers.

**Group Life:** The group cohesion and bonding both within the work group and with Central American friends and coworkers is one of the most unforgettable aspects of a work group experience. Time is set aside regularly for group meetings to share experiences and to reflect on social issues and the meaning of the work. Volunteers work together to make joint decisions and discuss issues, including impressions, joys, concerns, and conflicts.

**Interaction with the Community:** North American volunteers work alongside men, women and children from the local communities where they work. Opportunities to play with and learn from local children are at every hand. In most cases, North Americans participate in both welcoming and departure festivities with the local community. There are often opportunities to visit in local homes. In addition, volunteers have time to explore the towns where they are staying

**Food:** The markets in both countries provide fresh fruits and vegetables, baked breads, and other commodities for healthy meals. In El Salvador and Nicaragua, volunteers often prepare their own breakfasts and/or pack lunches to take to the work sites. Dinners are usually catered by or eaten at local restaurants. Vegetarians, vegans, and those people with restricted diets should be aware that, although in-country staff does their best to accommodate special needs, there is not a lot of variety in the food the group may eat. Group members should always check with in-country staff about where to shop, and what is safe for group members to eat.

**Travel:** Participants visit scenic areas of the country on one weekend during trip. Options may include a trip to a coffee growing community or visits to other SOL projects. Groups usually spend one day visiting a craft market or visiting various historical and cultural sites in the capital before leaving.



**Finances:** A work group early discount price is \$1,300 per person plus airfare. This amount covers food, lodging, in-country transportation, a donation to Seeds of Learning's building fund, and a program fee to support SOL's education programs in Central America. Typically, SOL can obtain group airfares in the range of \$550 to \$800 per person from major US cities to Central America. Each person also takes US dollars (cash) for tourist cards/visas to enter each country: \$10 for Nicaragua and \$10 for El Salvador. Participants should also take along US dollars (cash) for spending money. Usually people take around \$150 for spending money to purchase crafts and other personal incidentals. The local currency in El Salvador is the US dollar. The Nicaraguan currency is Cordobas. Participants can exchange money in Nicaragua. The *Matt Schekel Memorial Scholarship Application* is optional, for youth with financial need only. All volunteers are welcome to use the *Sample Fundraising Letter* to raise funds for their trip. **Note:** The entire cost of the work group, including airfare purchased through SOL is considered a donation to Seeds of Learning, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Please consult your tax advisor for determining how much of this can be claimed as a donation on your federal income tax return. You will receive a tax deduction letter in the late fall of the year you travel.

**Health concerns:** Expect to experience hot, humid, and rustic conditions. It is extremely important to monitor your health and keep your group leader and SOL staff informed regarding illnesses and other medical conditions. Whenever you feel tired, short of breath or faint, stop work immediately and don't push yourself. All group members will always have access to plenty of safe, purified water, as well as three well prepared, clean meals a day. Please be sure to carefully read the *Health and Safety Guidelines* before going on your trip.

**Participant Selection:** Many groups are deliberately intergenerational, with past ages ranging from 8 to 84 years of age. Youth groups are also welcome. In open work groups, participants who are under 16 must travel with a parent or responsible adult who will take responsibility for parenting the minor during the entire trip. All volunteers must complete the *Work Group Volunteer Application*, meet SOL's criteria to be a participant in a work group, and accept the *SOL Standards of Conduct and Community Behavior*.

**Language:** Spanish is spoken throughout Nicaragua and El Salvador. Very few persons you will encounter will speak English. Some familiarity with Spanish will enable you to exchange simple information and greetings. However, SOL does not require any prior knowledge of Spanish to participate in the work group program. All group activities and educational outings are translated for volunteers. Volunteers who speak Spanish often get the most out of the work group experience, but people with no Spanish also find it rewarding.

**Application Preparation and Required Pre-Departure Group Meetings:** Volunteers should carefully read all of the materials in the *SOL Work Group Volunteer Packet* and return all necessary forms to SOL to hold a spot in a group (**see page 2 for due dates**). Volunteers must attend at least three of the four pre-departure group meetings. Individuals who are unable to make any of the meetings (because of distance) should be in contact with the SOL office and the work group leader. Before the trip, volunteers should also reflect on what this trip means to them.

**Leadership and In-Country Travel:** Each work group is led by one or more experienced leaders who will travel with the group at all times. Before departure, either the group leader or US SOL staff will



provide orientation materials and/or, a personal presentation. A DVD of a typical service project is available. The group will receive a thorough orientation from staff in Nicaragua or El Salvador upon arrival, and SOL staff will accompany the group at all times in country. At times, group participants may ride in the back of pickup trucks. All riders must be seated while on highways. If a minor must return to the US early, the in-country staff will accompany that individual to the airport until the plane has departed. If an adult must return to the US early, the in-country staff will ensure the timely arrival to the airport with trusted contracted transportation. If at any point during the trip the work group leader or in-country staff deems the behavior of a group participant to be in violation of the *SOL Standards of Personal Conduct and Community Behavior*, they may approach SOL's executive director, who has the right to send participants home early. Participants will incur all expenses plus a penalty fee.

**Donations:** SOL maintains a list of needed items appropriate for the schools and communities where we work (see *Nicaragua/El Salvador Educational Programs Needs List*). Some of the items on the list are priorities identified by in-country staff that we are fundraising for. Individuals or groups may wish to help to fundraise for the prioritized items. Please contact the SOL office for further details. We are careful to work with communities as a whole, rather than individuals within a community when donating items. In this way, resources can be shared by all. It is important that volunteers traveling with SOL do not give things or money to individuals.

**Keeping People Informed:** SOL provides emergency contact information for all participants prior to their departure and SOL staff has cell phones to receive emergency calls. You can make calls to the US with a locally purchased calling card. Most US calling cards do not work with the public phones in Nicaragua or El Salvador. We recommend bringing extra money to buy cards in country, however, frequent calls and emails are not encouraged. Do not expect to make contact with the US on a daily basis.

**Registration:** To reserve a spot in an open group, complete the enclosed *Work Group Volunteer Application* and submit it with the \$600 deposit to SOL. Each volunteer must have a passport that is valid for at least 6 months after the trip begins. For US citizens, tourist visas are required and are purchased upon arrival at the airport of the country the group will visit. Participants who are not US citizens are responsible for ensuring they meet all entry and exit requirements for host countries and the US.



## Health and Safety Guidelines

While we take as many precautions as possible to ensure the health and safety of work group volunteers, it is a rare group in which no one becomes ill. Intestinal discomfort and diarrhea are the most common ailments, followed by heat exhaustion and dehydration. In Central America, food and water borne diseases are the number one cause of illness in travelers. Traveler's diarrhea can be caused by viruses, bacteria, or parasites, which are found throughout Central America and can contaminate food or water. In the event that someone does become sick while in Central America, SOL staff maintains an up to date list of professional health care providers and clinic to serve patients. Please note that medical costs will need to be covered by individual's money (we recommend saving the receipts from any costs incurred, to later submit to one's health insurance company). SOL uses the Centers for Disease Control's (CDC) most current recommendations as a guide when making recommendations for the following vaccines and/or preventative medications:

See your doctor at least 4-6 weeks before your trip to allow time for immunizations to take effect. For those immunizations and/or medications listed as optional, please consult your physician for further information and consideration.

- Hepatitis A or immune globulin (IG) (required)
- Hepatitis B (optional, as it really applies to individuals who are planning to stay longer than 6 months, although we do strongly recommend Hepatitis B for children 11-12 years old who did not receive the Hepatitis B series as infants)
- Typhoid Fever and Malaria pills are both optional. Please be aware that some anti-malaria medications have potentially serious, debilitating side effects (e.g. Chloroquine). Therefore, it is strongly recommended that you consult your health care provider regarding which of the various anti-malaria prescription drugs might be least likely to affect you with adverse side-effects and make the decision whether to take them or not with your health care provider.

### **In order to stay healthy, take the following precautions:**

- Keep hands clean by washing with soap and water, or use waterless hand sanitizer (purchased in the US) or wipes before meals and after using restrooms or latrines.
- Drink only purified, bottled water or carbonated drinks in cans or bottles. Avoid tap water, fountain drinks, and ice cubes. Make sure water bottles have caps that cover the spouts to avoid bacterial contamination. Don't share water bottles with others in your group or with local coworkers. Brush your teeth with purified water.
- Drink plenty of purified water to prevent headaches and dehydration – at least 2 quarts/day.
- Volunteers have also found it very helpful to bring powdered Gatorade powder for re-hydration and to stay hydrated. You may consider bringing an extra water bottle for this.
- Eat only thoroughly cooked food or fruits and vegetables that you have peeled yourself or that have been prepared by SOL pre-selected eating establishments. Avoid eating food from street vendors.



- Protect yourself from insects by using repellants with 30%-35% DEET for adults and 6%-10% for children (apply sparingly at 4-hour intervals) or natural insect repellant with citronella and wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants from dusk through dawn.
- To protect yourself against the damaging effects of the sun, apply sun block regularly and wear a hat and sunglasses.
- To prevent fungal and parasitic infections, keep feet clean and dry, and do not go barefoot. Wear plastic shoes in the shower.
- Some people have found it very useful to take Pepto Bismol or acidophilus tablets either every morning or before every meal as a preventative measure.
- Ensure that you bring a supply of all necessary prescription medications with the pharmacy label on the prescription package.
- No one is permitted to go out alone at night. With workdays that start early and security concerns, all who go out in the evening should notify the group leader before going, and return by 10 PM or the local curfew set by SOL staff.
- Monitor your health. Keep your group leader and SOL staff informed of your status, including diarrhea and exhaustion, so that they are able to help monitor your health. When you feel tired, take it easy—don't push yourself to exhaustion that could make you susceptible to illness and/or accidents.

#### **First Aid**

- Each group will be provided a first aid kit in Nicaragua or El Salvador.
- SOL staff has developed emergency response plans and has directories for local medical professionals and pharmacies in case of medical emergencies.

#### **Other Health and Safety Concerns:**

- For more information about health and safety concerns:
  - Review your Emergency Medical Insurance plan (provided for the group by SOL).
  - Visit the Centers for Disease Control website at [www.cdc.gov/travel/camerica.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/travel/camerica.htm)
  - If you are visiting Nicaragua, the State Department Consular Information Sheet is available at [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_985.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_985.html)
  - If you are visiting El Salvador, the State Department Consular Information Sheet is available at [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_1109.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1109.html)
  - Consult your personal physician and/or a medical professional at your local travel clinic (see local phone directories).



## Cultural Differences

There are a number of cultural differences between the United States and Central America. Beyond the obvious differences in language and the people, there are slight idiosyncrasies that are often revealed in the culture. By better understanding some of the differences, such as the concept of time, dress and behavior, and manners and language, volunteers will have a more enriching experience while in country.

**Time:** The pace of life and the speed with which things happen in Central America are generally slower than what many people are used to in the United States. People may show up late for appointments, or perhaps not at all. Most people you will meet do not expect expediency and efficiency in their lives on a daily basis. They are not accustomed to quick and easy Internet access, express gas stations with credit card machines at the pump, cell phones, answering machines, pagers and other gadgets. The country you are visiting is a less developed country, which has not had the opportunity to access much of the technology and resources of the so-called "developed countries." This translates into slower, bumpier roads (if any), unreliable telephones, power and water outages, crowded buses that may break down, and moments (even hours) when you may have to stand around waiting for people. SOL encourages volunteers to understand these differences and to be patient and sensitive to the delays and comparatively slower pace of life in Central America. Many volunteers have found the pace actually quite refreshing during their work group experience.

**Dress and Behavior:** Although Central Americans may have patches on their well-worn clothing; you will notice that when they step out of their homes, they look presentable. Cut-off shorts, dirty t-shirts and baggy jeans are generally not a part of the Central American wardrobe. Most people's clothing is neat and pressed. It is important to respect this and err on the side of more conservative dress, rather than giving offense to locals. White women in Central American countries tend to draw a lot of attention from men. SOL encourages women to dress conservatively so as not to draw unwanted attention to themselves and the entire group. Short skirts and shorts, very low cut shirts, and shirts with spaghetti straps should not be worn.

**Manners and Language:** One of the most difficult parts of being in another country is getting past the language barrier and being able to communicate with the people around you. Although you may feel that you do not know a single word of Spanish, it means a lot to local people if you at least try. Remember that just as you may not know Spanish, often they do not know English. Elevating your voice or speaking slower to someone in English will not necessarily make you better understood by a native Spanish speaker. It will likely just offend them. Motioning, signing, showing, or using the simple words "okay," "por favor" (please) and "gracias"(thank you) can make a world of difference, as your effort to communicate will not be lost on the other person. If you know a little Spanish, use it! You will make mistakes and may be laughed at, but in a very supportive way, and you will find yourself encouraged to try more.



## Guidelines for Responsible Travel

*When traveling in any foreign country, especially the countries that you will be visiting, it is very important to adhere to the following guidelines for responsible travel. Please contact our office should you have a concern or question about any of these.*

- Travel in the spirit of humility and with a genuine desire to meet and talk with local people; travel to meet, not conquer.
- Reflect daily on your experiences; seek to deepen your understanding. “What enriches you may rob or violate others.”
- Be environmentally friendly; use energy, water and other resources efficiently and in keeping with local practices. Only bring necessary technological gadgetry. Participate in local recycling programs where available. Try not to bring into the country any containers that you don’t plan to take out.
- Don't create barriers
- Acquaint yourself with the local customs. Be culturally sensitive, especially with photography; people will be happy to help you.
- Realize that the people in the area you visit often have time concepts and thought patterns different from your own; not inferior, just different.
- Be economically beneficial. Spend money so that it stays in the community. When buying, remember that a bargain may be obtained because of low wages paid to the producer. Do not purchase products made from endangered species.
- If alternatives exist, try not to buy US products that are made by companies whose profits leave the communities (such as multinational companies) where they are sold
- Cultivate the habit of listening and observing, rather than merely hearing and looking. Discover the enrichment that comes from seeing another way of life.
- Listen and learn, please do not criticize cultural practices.
- Make an effort to learn the names of our in-country staff and the people with whom you work, even a few phrases in Spanish.
- Evaluate requests for gifts carefully, please do not give individual gifts, but communicate requests and desires to give to our in-country staff.



## What to Bring to Central America

Pack lightly. Most of the time, you will want to be in clothes that you can get dirty and that will take wear. Bring short sleeves for work, a light jacket or sweater for cooler times. There will be opportunities to do laundry by hand or pay someone to wash your clothes (approximately \$.20 per piece.) **Please check for last minute baggage information and TSA measures at the airline website for baggage limits and size restrictions.** If you are flying on TACA airlines you are allowed two free check-on bags (under 50 lbs each) and one carry-on bag (up to 22 lbs). Generally, we ask volunteers to fit to allow one of the checked pieces to carry donations for SOL (volunteer donated school supplies and/or donations in the SOL office). We recommend not bringing jewelry, wedding rings, nice watches, cell phones, discmans, ipods, video cameras, and other electronic devices.

**Money:** Be sure to bring US cash for tourist visa entrance fees: \$10 for Nicaragua, \$10 for El Salvador. Depending on the amount of crafts and souvenirs you plan to purchase, we recommend bringing about \$50-150 of spending money. This should be in US dollars (small bills such as 20's, 10's, 5's, and 1's). Do not expect access to ATM's while in Central America.

**Documentation:** Passport - must be valid for at least six months after the date of departure.

**Clothing: (easy to rinse fabrics are recommended as they can be washed and dried easily)**

- 1 long sleeve cotton work shirt, mostly for sun and insect protection
- 2 pair jeans or work pants (or additional shorts if you prefer)
- 2 pair shorts
- 4-5 T-shirts
- Underwear, socks, night clothes
- 1 jacket, sweater, windbreaker or waterproof jacket or rain poncho (rainy season May – August)
- 1 pair work shoes or boots (worksites can be very muddy, closed toed shoes are required on worksites) 1 pair tennis or other comfortable shoes, 1 pair thongs/sandals
- Hat with wide brim or baseball cap, sunglasses
- 1 pair good work gloves
- 1 set of nice, comfortable clothes for travel and city
- 2 sets of after-work comfortable clothes
- Swim suit

**Accessories:**

- Bandana
- Flashlight, toilet articles, (remember all gels and liquids must be in checked luggage)
- Day pack
- 1 light blanket if you get cold easily (El Salvador only)



**Health:** see *Health and Safety Guidelines*

- ❑ Malaria pills are not required - always consult a physician
- ❑ All other prescription medications you need – enough for the whole trip.
- ❑ 1 - 2 water bottles (with cap to protect area you drink from)
- ❑ Mosquito repellent containing 30% - 35% DEET for adults and 6% -10% for children (or natural repellent, containing citronella, such as Burts Bees or NaturaPel)
- ❑ Sun screen (if you burn easily, make sure it's at least SPF 30)
- ❑ Treatments for insect bites, sunburn, diarrhea, headaches and general aches & pains.
- ❑ Preventive medicine: acidophilus (we **HIGHLY** recommend to take this before, during and after the trip) or Pepto Bismol can be very helpful for upset stomach, lip balm, hand wipes, antibacterial soap, vitamins.

**Optional - volunteers often find useful:**

- ❑ Spanish dictionary with common phrases
- ❑ Alarm clock
- ❑ Small gifts (tokens) for children and community – bulk (e.g. 200) of the same things, rather than a large variety
- ❑ Small gifts (tokens) for SOL staff and others – and notecards for farewell messages
- ❑ Notebook for journaling, book to read, inspirational book of readings/quotations to share with the group, playing cards
- ❑ Simple crafts and games (i.e. origami, jump ropes, soccer balls, Spanish story books, bracelet making supplies) to share with local communities at the LRC (in Nicaragua)
- ❑ Ear plugs for sleeping (especially if you are even slightly sensitive to noises at night) (**HIGHLY RECOMMENDED**)
- ❑ Ziploc bags
- ❑ Camera, batteries
- ❑ Leatherman or other pocket knife (must be in your checked luggage)
- ❑ Pictures of your family and/or home community
- ❑ Power bars, trail mix or snacks
- ❑ Gatorade powder for staying hydrated (**HIGHLY RECOMMENDED**)
- ❑ Favorite foods, though we encourage you to eat local foods, which will be provided during your stay
- ❑ **School supplies for donation to Seeds of Learning for SOL's distribution to schools (see Education Programs Needs List). As much as you can take in your luggage the better!**



## Nicaragua Educational Programs Needs List

*Use these lists to collect supplies to bring with you to Central America. You may ask other people in your group to carry supplies as well. The US SOL office may also send you with some supplies. Upon your arrival, let the in-country coordinator know that you have these materials and they will accept and later distribute them to the appropriate SOL staff in order to distribute through our programs. Before collecting any donations, please call the SOL USA office to review priorities.*

Category	Items	Quantity Needed	High Priority	Medium Priority
School Supplies				
	Small Notebook	1000	X	
	Large Notebook	700	X	
	Pens	500	X	
	Pencils	1000	X	
	Colored Pencils (boxes)	50		
	Markers	400		X
	Highlighters	50	X	
	Crayons	1000	X	
	Colored Paper			
	Colored Construction Paper			
	Poster board (sheets)	50	X	
	Scissors	100		X
	Glue Sticks	50	X	
	Tape (rolls)	50		X
	Calculators	20	X	
	Scientific Calculators	20	X	
	Rulers	1000		X
	Pencil Sharpeners	1000		X
	Erasers	100	X	
	Paper clips (boxes)	50		X
	Staples (boxes)	50		X
	Binders	100	X	
	Protractor kit	50	X	
	3.5" diskette	100	X	
	Backpacks for (high school students)	50	X	
Sala Infantil/Satellite LRC				
	Wooden Puzzles	20		X
	Simple cardboard or foam Puzzles	20		X
	Simple Games with letters or numbers	20	X	
	Legos (boxes)	10		X
	Stuffed Animals/puppets	20	X	
	Large Storybooks in Spanish	20	X	
	Videos/ DVDs of classic stories (Spanish)	10	X	
	Audio-tapes of stories on cassette or CD (Spanish)		X	
	Spanish Storybooks	200		



<b>Materials for Courses</b>				
	Art-quality tube-type Oil Paints			
	Art-quality Brushes			
	Crafts Materials		X	
	Guitars (good condition) (preferably Electric-Acoustic)		X	
	Fabric for costumes and sewing class	50yds		X
<b>Office and Administration</b>				
	New or slightly used Windows laptop computers (Pentium III or better)		X	
	\$ for External hard drive, small AC unit, file cabinets, office chairs, new photocopier			
	Dry Erase Markers		X	
<b>Carpentry and Construction</b>				
	Air Compressor	1	X	
	Hammers	5	X	
	Wrenches			X
	Screwdrivers	5 to 10		X
	Stanley saw-tooth hand saws	5	X	
	Jig Saw	1	X	
	Angle Grinder (small)	1	X	
	Metric tape measures	5	X	
<b>Computer Lab</b>				
	Stabilizers/Battery backups	3	X	
<b>Library</b>				
	Study skill books			
	Modern novels in Spanish			
<b>Other</b>				
	Sports equipment (soccer and baseball)		X	
	VCR head cleaner	1		
	Sheets + pillow cases (twin bed fitted and flat)	22	X	
<b>Printer</b>				
	Cartridge Numbers			
HP Photosmart 8200	Black #02 -Yellow #02- Light Cyan #02 -Cyan #02 - Light Magenta #02 - Magenta #02			
Fax: Sharp UX-P115	Sharp UX-5CR imaging film			
Canon AL 1530CS (copier)	Canon A30 toner cartridges			
Canon iP4000	Black #6, Black #3e, Yellow #6, Magenta #6, Cyan #6			



## El Salvador Educational Programs Needs List

*Use these lists to collect supplies to bring with you to Central America. You may ask other people in your group to carry supplies as well. The US SOL office may also send you with some supplies. Upon arriving to El Salvador, let the in-country coordinator know that you have these materials and they will accept and later distribute them to the appropriate SOL staff in order to distribute through our programs. Please call the SOL USA office to review priorities*

- New Laptop Computer
  - Spiral bound notebooks
  - Pens, pencils, crayons
  - Educational games
  - Puzzles, story books
  - Primary writing paper
  - Scissors (regular & pinking)
  - Markers, colored pencils
  - Construction paper
  - Shiny paper
  - Play dough or modeling clay
  - Glue
  - Dominoes, checkers/chess
  - Bingo
  - Maps/posters
  - Soccer balls or kick-balls
  - Toys/puppets
  - Angle Grinder
- College ruled notebooks (even used notebooks with the pages that have been used torn out)
- Low quality typing paper
  - Pens
  - Pencils
  - Money to buy textbooks, notebooks, and paper in El Salvador



## Matt Schekel Memorial Scholarship

The Matt Schekel Memorial Scholarship Fund was created early in 2002 by Marcia and Kurt Schekel in memory of their son Matthew. Seeds of Learning, with Matt's family and friends, wishes to bestow this memorial scholarship on youth who have financial need and who exhibit compassion, kindness and a strong commitment to serve their global community as Seeds of Learning work group volunteers.

Matthew Schekel was born in Colorado in 1970. He grew up in Washington State. When he was in the second grade, a 7-year-old Vietnamese girl was added to his class after the start of the school year. She spoke no English. Matt befriended her. He introduced her to others and made sure she was not left alone on the playground.

This was the way Matt continued to live his life – with kindness, openness and curiosity for the world. He was a reader, a big movie and TV fan, and a music lover. He had a great sense of humor and an open heart. He accepted all people and was especially interested in those who struggled in our society.



*Matt Schekel in December of 1997*

Matt died in 1998 when his bicycle and a truck met at an intersection in Portland, Oregon. He was 27 and a student at the Northwest Film School in Portland.

If Matt were here today, he would support Seeds of Learning programs enthusiastically. We would like to affirm his participation through this scholarship, enabling others to be as active as Matt might have been in building schools and relationships in Central America.

- Marcia and Kurt Schekel



## Matt Schekel Memorial Scholarship Application

*This application should be completed and sent directly to Seeds of Learning.*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_

School (if applicable) \_\_\_\_\_

Work Group Dates \_\_\_\_\_

Country of Service \_\_\_\_\_

Seeds of Learning actively recruits and supports volunteers from all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. All youth volunteers (under 30) who have been accepted into the work group program may apply for this scholarship. The average scholarship amount is approximately \$250.00, but varies based on funds available and proven financial need.

### To apply:

- Complete the information on this page (including your signature below).
- Write a 1 - 2 page application letter addressing each of the points listed in the guidelines on the following page.
- If you are under 18 years of age, include an accompanying letter from a parent describing the financial need for the scholarship.
- Optional: include up to two letters of recommendations from family members, friends, or coworkers.

Completed applications and letters must be received by the SOL office no later than **March 10, 2012** for groups traveling January - April and no later than **May 20, 2012** for group traveling June - August.

### Please read and sign below:

If I am chosen to receive a Matt Schekel Memorial Scholarship, I agree to:

- Provide a service to SOL in the year following the completion of my work group experience (e.g. write an article, make a presentation, participate in local SOL programs and events, develop a SOL awareness activity with other youth).
- Write a one-page reflection on my trip, outlining how the experience affected me, and what I learned from it *within 21 days* of my return

I have read and agree to the two points listed above: \_\_\_\_\_(signature)



## Scholarship Application Letter Requirements

In the Application Letter, *all* applicants must:

1. Describe a significant financial need for a scholarship, including (for those under 18 years of age) a supporting statement from a parent or guardian.
2. Explain your reasons for wanting to become a SOL work group volunteer, your goals as you see them now, and benefits you feel you will derive from this experience.
3. Explain what you feel you may offer to the SOL work group and the community where you will be volunteering (in terms of Spanish language proficiency, work and building experience, working with children, and any other skills).
4. Contact family, friends, churches, schools, and others who may be able to provide some financial support. Attached to this application form is a sample SOL letter that can be used to help you solicit additional funding support from family and friends. Indicate in your letter of application how you plan to use this SOL funding request letter.
5. Include in your letter of application a statement of ways you think you could provide a service to SOL upon the completion of your work group (see previous page for examples).

### Criteria for selection are:

- Demonstration of financial need
- Demonstration (in the written letter) of skills or experiences that would be highly beneficial to the SOL workgroup service project.
- Commitment to community service

Note: Preference will be given to youth volunteers who have not formerly applied for SOL scholarship assistance.



## Sample Fundraising Letters

*The letter below briefly describes SOL's work group program and projects in Central America. Regardless of whether you apply for the Matt Schekel Memorial Scholarship or not, we encourage all volunteers who need financial assistance with the cost of the work group to use the contents of this letter to write their own letter to friends, relatives, church members, school teachers, etc. You may want to suggest a donation of \$50 or so from each person. Note that the second and third paragraphs in the letter correspond to Nicaragua and El Salvador groups respectively. You should choose the appropriate paragraph to describe your trip and add in any more information you want about this trip and what it means to you. The total cost of the group is \$1300 plus airfare. SOL will not refund additional donations made beyond the deadline or total cost of the trip. SOL will thank the donors who give on your behalf and will add them to our mailing list unless we hear otherwise from the donor. **Please let the people you are soliciting support from let SOL know if they do not want to be on our mailing list.***

Dear

This summer, I hope to travel to and volunteer to help build and improve a much-needed school in a rural community. I will be a part of a work group organized by Seeds of Learning (SOL), a nonprofit organization based in Sonoma, California. SOL's mission is to enrich the future through education in the Americas. The work group (made up of volunteers from all over the area, with people of all ages) will spend two weeks working alongside community members to mix cement, lay bricks, and build friendships as we learn from each other. I see this experience as an opportunity to expand my understanding of my own culture as well as learn about another part of the world, and how people live there.

In **Nicaragua/El Salvador** I will work in a small community alongside the local people living in a rural area to build a public school. I will work with Seeds of Learning to build a school where there either is no school, or additional classrooms are needed. I will also be meeting with and working alongside some of Seeds of Learning's high school and/or university scholarship students. I will spend time visiting the cultural sites and learning more about **Nicaragua/El Salvador's** education, history, economics, and politics.

Any support that you can give me in this trip will help very much, as I need to raise \$1300 plus airfare for the trip (which usually is \$550 - \$800). You may write a check to Seeds of Learning and be sure to put my name on the check so the money will go towards my trip. Please send the donation to me and I will submit it to SOL. All donations are tax-deductible, to the extent allowed by law, and SOL will send you a thank you letter as a receipt of this donation to SOL.

Thank you very much.