



Seeds of Learning Work Group Policies and Guidelines

The following policies are designed by SOL to help ensure that volunteers, work group leaders, community, and staff members have a safe and meaningful experience in our program. Each SOL volunteer (and his/her parents when volunteer is under 18 years of age), should CAREFULLY read the following policies and SOL Standards of Personal Conduct and Community Behavior. Participation in a SOL work group requires that volunteers understand and agree to follow all of the policies and standards listed below.

SOL Policies

Adult Leaders and Chaperones: SOL will always have at least one adult in a group with minors (under the age of 18).

Staffing Work Groups: SOL will always have at least two staff members available to work with each work group. Staff members may be from SOL, or contracted with a partner organization.

Material Possessions: SOL strongly suggests that participants do not bring any ipods, cell phones, expensive jewelry, cameras, etc. SOL asks people to keep their belongings as minimal as possible. SOL is not responsible for any lost, stolen or misplaced personal belongings.

Communication via phone and Internet with friends/family while on a work group – In order to gain the full experience of a work group in Nicaragua, SOL strongly discourages constant and daily communication with friends and family from home while participating in a work group.

Airline Travel: While SOL often makes the group's travel arrangements directly with airlines, SOL is NOT responsible for any airline delays, lost luggage, changes in airline schedules once the passengers are ticketed, overbooking or any costs incurred by volunteers resulting in any airline itinerary changes, overbooking, etc.

With regards to Nicaragua Safety

Trips to Nicaragua are dependent on the ongoing safety and subject to change based on staff and Board risk assessment. If it is deemed unsafe to continue, and SOL cancels the trip, SOL would refund any payments made for the trip, minus a \$200 deposit to cover administrative costs. If changes are made (and it is determined by SOL unsafe to go) *after* airfare is purchased, SOL will *only* refund up to the total amount SOL is able to recover from the airline. If anyone decides to cancel based on their perception of safety, the same policy applies, as above, (SOL will refund all of the SOL fees, minus a \$200 deposit fee). If someone decides to cancel for reasons unrelated to safety, then the regular work group cancellation policy will apply.

Donations/Tips to SOL Staff Members: SOL asks work group volunteers to not give tips or personal donations to any staff member or contracted employees during a SOL Work Group (including bus drivers, translators, etc.). Any additional gratitude that you may have for a SOL staff member, and/or contracted employee we encourage you to express in words of appreciation, letters, etc., but we kindly ask you to not give tips to individuals. Our staff has found that giving to individuals often creates inequality, and can be divisive. Any tips that do end up reaching SOL staff will be treated as a general donation to SOL. It should also be noted that SOL, in its Personnel Manual, prohibits its employees from soliciting gifts or



scholarships from SOL volunteers. If a volunteer feels pressured by any SOL staff member to provide a gift or scholarship, he/she is encouraged to discuss the issue with the in-country Director, Coordinator, and/or SOL Work Group Director or Executive Director.

Material Gifts to Individuals: Based on many years of working in Nicaragua, as well as the experience of countless others involved in international development, SOL embraces a number of maxims that relate to donations:

1. It's better to give a hand up than a handout. Instead of simply distributing materials to meet immediate needs, SOL strives to provide people with the means to help themselves and their communities to develop and rise up out of poverty. This helps to empower individuals and communities in such a way that allows them to gain long-term, sustainable benefits, and not just momentary ones.
2. It's better to help groups of people rather than individuals. Individual giving has the potential to produce divisions within communities, while giving to groups can create unity and solidarity.
3. Any support to individuals (e.g. scholarships) must be determined through a fair, objective, and transparent process that does not favor certain individuals or groups of people due to personal relationships or relations. Favoritism can compromise the goodwill of the organization and its standing in the community.

Based on these principles, SOL discourages work group volunteers from giving substantially to individuals, whether community members or employees of SOL, with whom they have cultivated a personal friendship. Substantial giving can be thought of as consisting of gifts with a value of over \$20, including scholarships, monetary gifts, cameras, etc. It is understandable that one might wish to give a photo of oneself, a hat, or some other small item as a reminder of one's friendship with an individual, and SOL does not discourage this sort of giving. If you have questions about a gift, please ask the SOL staff leader in Nicaragua.

Even though SOL discourages substantial giving to individuals as outlined above, there are a number of alternate channels for donating, which are encouraged by SOL and which further SOL's mission.

SOL Standards of Personal Conduct and Community Behavior

SOL work group volunteers shall:

- Read and carefully consider all materials issued by SOL that relate to the work group experience.
- Consider their health and other personal circumstances when applying to the work group program.
- Make available to SOL accurate and complete physical and mental health information and any other personal data necessary in planning for a safe and healthy work group experience on the *SOL Work Group Volunteer Application*.
- Assume responsibility for all the elements necessary for their personal preparation for the program and participate fully in pre-departure meetings.
- Inform parents/guardians/families, and any others who may need to know, about their participation in the Seeds of Learning work group and provide them with emergency contact information.
- Understand and comply with the standards of personal conduct and emergency procedures of the program, and obey both the home country of citizen and the host country laws.
- Be aware of local conditions and customs that may present health or safety risks when making daily choices and decisions.
- Promptly express any health or safety concerns to the program staff or other appropriate individuals.
- Behave in a manner that is respectful of the rights and well being of others, and encourage others to behave in a similar manner.
- Accept responsibility for their decisions and actions.

SOL work group volunteers shall not:

- Engage in any behavior that may be harmful to the health & safety of others.
- Engage in any behavior that may be detrimental to the program.
- Use or possess any drugs that are illegal under the laws of the US or the host country.
- Operate any motorized vehicle or ride on a motorcycle.
- Consume any alcoholic beverage if under the age of 21.
- Smoke cigarettes or tobacco
- Handle firearms or fireworks.
- Form romantic relationships during the trip with either host country nationals or other group members.

Procedures in the event of a Violation of the Standards

An infraction or disregard of the *SOL Standards of Personal Conduct and Community Behavior* may result in the volunteer's immediate dismissal from the SOL Work Group Program and return to their home country. When a volunteer violates the *SOL Standards of Personal Conduct and Community Behavior*, all of SOL's programs suffer. Staff, community volunteers, and the group itself are affected by the disturbance of normal operations. Any volunteer who is dismissed from a SOL Work Group due to a violation of *SOL Standards of Personal Conduct and Community Behavior* will be charged \$700 (to cover airline ticket charges, additional lodging, food, staff time, and disruption to the program). The decision to send a work group volunteer home is made by the Executive Director of Seeds of Learning, after consulting with the work group leader and SOL staff. We sincerely hope that we will not have to send people home, however we have in the past due to underage drinking. We are very serious about enforcing this rule and expect parents and teens to be as well. If a minor must return home early, SOL staff will accompany that individual to the airport and leave once the participant has gone thru the security gates and the flight is confirmed on time departure. 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.