



SOL Work Group Volunteer Packet

For Groups Traveling to Puerto Rico

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Seeds of Learning
PO Box 2107, Sonoma, CA 95476
Phone: (707) 939-0471, Fax: (707) 939-1951
Email: info@seedsoflearning.org Website: www.seedsoflearning.org

Welcome to Seeds of Learning (SOL)

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 4,450 work group volunteers who have traveled to Latin America with us.

Since SOL first began its work in Central America, 28 years ago, we have been very careful to approach our work with humility and respect. We do not approach our role working with communities in their development process as knowing what is best for them. Instead, we are invited by a community to work with them in a particular area. Then, as a way to further establish a relationship of trust and respect, we learn more about the community's needs and aspirations in working towards commonly defined goals. We share the understanding with the local community that their involvement, commitment and leadership in this process is what will guarantee its success.

SOL is now partnering with HASER and Armonía en La Montaña, a farmer-operated education and agriculture nonprofit in Puerto Rico to learn about, help recover, preserve and build a sustainable future after the devastation of Hurricane Maria in 2017. Besides producing food, Armonía also receives community and school groups and offers workshops and educational services.

Agroecology is a growing global movement that offers a holistic solution to the urgent needs in Puerto Rico and other places worldwide. Author Naomi Klein defines agroecology as a “combination of traditional farming methods that promotes resilience and protects biodiversity, a rejection of pesticides and other toxins, and a commitment to rebuilding social relationships between farmers and local communities.” A just and sustainable world of tomorrow calls for a transition to systems that ensure food security and nutrition for all, provide social and economic equity, and conserve biodiversity and the ecosystem services on which agriculture depends.

SOL welcomes volunteers to join with us in this relationship-building and empowering process of working together for the common good. We invite you to join the SOL family, which has carefully and respectfully shared, learned, and grown together by way of this intentional approach. As you enter into this relationship with SOL, please carefully read this packet.

Work Group Program and Travel Information

Purpose and Program Description: SOL's Work Group Program in Puerto Rico is designed to promote solidarity and cross-cultural education in order to better understand and reduce poverty and inequality in the world. The emphasis is on building bridges of friendship with Puerto Ricans, to learn about the impact of Hurricane Maria, to help grow food on sustainable farms and to learn about agroecology and its impact.

Volunteers will help with farm labor such as planting, weeding, harvesting, and soil preparation on agroecology inspired farms. Volunteers will also learn about food systems and the environmental and social relationships that are woven into agroecology's multifaceted approach. Working closely with the land, volunteers will help to sow seeds and new life into Puerto Rico and connect with the ancient practice of small scale farming in a way that exposes them to the earth and the abundance that working intimately with nature offers.

Educational Preparation: An integral part of the work group experience takes place during the pre trip meetings. Volunteers will get to know the other group members, review the logistics, learn about Puerto Rico, and plan for the trip together. *SOL requires that all work group volunteers attend at least three of the four pre-departure meetings, and strongly recommends volunteers attend all four.* We also encourage volunteers to educate themselves about the country as much as possible ahead of time in order to enrich the experience.

Accommodations and Work Conditions: Volunteers should expect to be exposed to rustic conditions. Do not expect hot showers or flush toilets. **Persons who have a low tolerance for dirt, roosters crowing and dogs barking at night, close-quarter living, serious medical concerns, or lack of privacy issues may not want to make this trip.** We encourage participants to personally reflect on how they will respond to the rustic conditions and close living quarters. If you have any hesitations about going due to your health, diet, or the conditions of the site please contact SOL to discuss if this is a good fit for you.

Group Life: The group cohesion and bonding both within the work group and with Puerto Rican friends and co-workers is one of the most unforgettable aspects of a work group experience. Time is set aside regularly for work group participant meetings during which volunteers can share about their experiences and reflect on social issues, the meaning of the work, reactions to what they experience, impressions, joys, concerns, conflicts, and more. The work group leader is responsible for facilitating these discussions, typically in the evenings.

Food: Vegetarians, vegans, and people with restricted diets should be aware that, although in-country staff does their best to accommodate special needs, there is not always a lot of variety in the food the group may eat. Meals often consist of rice, beans, corn tortillas, plantains, cheese, fruit, avocados, eggs and meat. If you have diet restrictions, please let SOL know well in advance. You should also identify yourself to the SOL Puerto Rico staff upon arrival to review your restrictions. They will do their best to meet your needs, but cannot guarantee it will be sufficient, depending on your restrictions. You may consider bringing some food from home to supplement the local diet.

Work Group Program Fee: The base work group program fee is \$1,500 plus airfare. A \$500 deposit is due with the volunteer application and the balance is due no later than 45 days before departure. This donation covers food (three meals a day), lodging, in-country transportation, emergency travelers insurance, staff support, and includes general support to Seeds of Learning. Consult your group leader for specific group payment amounts and schedules. For more information about scholarship support and fundraising opportunities see: [SOL Financial Assistance](#).

Tax Deductible Service Program Fees: If you are a U.S. taxpayer, you are eligible for out-of-pocket savings for the volunteer service program. The service program fees, airfare, visa, and related travel expenses are tax deductible if the participant adheres to SOL's program itinerary, because they perform the work of Seeds of Learning, a 501 c-3 tax-exempt organization. (See [IRS Form 526](#)). Our trips adhere to IRS requirements that students work, on average, eight hours per day, six days out of nine (or five out of seven) to ensure this tax benefit. We can provide a detailed itinerary, however, we also recommend you keep a personal journal detailing the hours you work for tax purposes. Those interested in claiming this benefit will need to consult a personal tax advisor for tax-deductibility advice. Please note: additional travel or vacation either before or after the service program may disqualify all or part of your service program fee, air fare, etc. from this tax deduction.

Communication in Puerto Rico: SOL provides emergency contact information for all participants prior to their departure and SOL staff has cell phones to receive emergency calls. While sometimes available, frequent calls and emails home are not encouraged.

Health Concerns and Limitations: Expect to experience hot, humid, rustic OR wet and cooler 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. While SOL strives to welcome all participants regardless of age or physical capabilities to the program, there are some serious limitations of the roads and physical infrastructure in Puerto Rico, which should be taken into account when deciding whether to participate in the work group program. If you have any doubts about your physical condition and/or have a chronic medical condition, which requires specialized attention please contact SOL.

Health and Safety Guidelines

While SOL staff takes as many precautions as possible to ensure the health and safety of all work group volunteers, it is a reality that illness does occur for some. Intestinal discomfort and diarrhea are the most common ailments, followed by heat exhaustion and dehydration. In the event that someone does become sick while in Puerto Rico, SOL staff maintains a list of professional health care providers and clinics to serve patients. Please note that all medical costs will need to be covered by the individual needing care.

We recommend following the [CDC & WHO](#) guidelines for immunizations.

Please consult your doctor at least **4-6 weeks before your trip** for further information, discussion, and consideration for travel to Puerto Rico prior to your trip.

Zika is a viral illness for which there is no immunization. The disease is spread through mosquito bites. Familiarize yourself with prevention recommendations for Zika

<https://www.cdc.gov/zika/prevention/index.html>

- You should make special consideration if you have any sort of health condition which could be made worse by getting Zika and be sure that you are comfortable with the risks and effects of these serious illnesses.

In order to stay healthy, take the following precautions:

- Keep hands clean by washing with soap and water, or using hand sanitizer.
- Make sure water bottles have caps that cover the spouts to avoid contamination. Don't share water bottles with others. Brush your teeth with purified water.
- Drink plenty of purified water to prevent dehydration – at least 3-4 quarts/day.
- Eat only food that has been prepared by a SOL pre-selected eating establishments.
- Protect yourself from insects with appropriate repellents and wear long-sleeved shirts and pants
- For protection against 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.
- Take **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. Do not plan on medicines being available for purchase.
- No one is permitted to go out alone at night. All who go out in the evening should notify the group leader before going and return by 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.
- SOL staff will have a first aid kit and emergency response plans and directories of medical professionals and pharmacies in case of medical emergencies.

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.

These guidelines were adapted from www.thetravelspecialists.biz

Packing List

Please check for last minute baggage information and TSA requirements at the airline website for baggage limits and size restrictions.

Documentation: Bring all of the following identification cards

1. Valid and current US government issued ID including a passport or driver's license
2. Insurance ID card, or a copy of both sides of the card
3. Student ID card

Much of your time will be working on a farm! Easy to rinse/dry clothes are recommended as they can be hand washed and dried easily. Bring enough clothing, as laundering will not be an option– so bring enough and/or plan on hand washing and air drying.

- Lightweight blanket for sleeping at night
- Twin fitted sheet and twin top sheet plus pillowcase
- 1 long sleeve over shirt, mostly for sun and insect protection for working on the farm
- 2-3 pair jeans or work pants (note that work clothes can be worn multiple times)
- 2-3 pair shorts
- 4-5 T-shirts for working (no tank tops)
- Underwear, socks, night clothes
- 1 jacket, sweater, windbreaker or waterproof jacket or rain poncho
- 1 pair work or rubber boots** (work sites can be very muddy) - no sandals on the worksite
- 1 pair tennis or other comfortable shoes
- 1 pair sandals
- Hat with a wide brim to protect from the sun is best or baseball cap, sunglasses
- 1 pair work gloves (leather or tighter fitting garden gloves)
- 1 set of nice, but casual comfortable clothes for plane travel and excursions to the city
- 2 sets of after-work comfortable clothes
- Swim suit
- Bandana
- Flashlight
- Day pack
- Towel
- All other prescription medications you need – enough for the whole trip
- 2 liter size refillable water bottles (with a cap to protect the area you drink from)
- Mosquito repellent (NOTE, only non-deet repellent, this organic farm that does not allow pesticides)
- Sunscreen (at least SPF 30)
- Treatments for insect bites, sunburn, diarrhea, headaches and general aches & pains
- Preventive medicine: acidophilus (HIGHLY recommended), lip balm, hand sanitizer, and vitamins.
- Toiletries (remember all gels and liquids over 3.4 oz. must be in checked luggage)
- Notebook for journaling, book to read, inspirational book of readings/quotations to share with the group, playing cards
- Earplugs for sleeping
- Ziploc bags
- Energy bars, granola bars, trail mix or snacks (though we encourage you to eat local foods, which will be provided during your stay)

Recommended Readings

Below are some recommended readings about Puerto Rico in general, the impacts of Hurricane Maria, the agroecology movement, and other inspiring stories from the island.

Links

[Boricua](#) SOL Partner Organization

[Agroecology Fact Sheet](#)

Articles

[Farming for a Small Planet: Agroecology Now](#) by Frances Moore Lappé

The Nation [Can farming Save Puerto Rico post Hurricane Maria?](#)

The Intercept by Naomi Klein [Hurricane recovery and the remaking of the island](#)

American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) [six recommended readings about Puerto Rico](#)

Common Dreams [Agroecology in Puerto Rico is happening in light of the profit opportunity](#)

Tara Rodriguez Besosa was [featured](#) in Vogue magazine. Her sister, Daniela who is a part of Boricua, was featured in the [NY Times](#)

The Battle for Paradise: Puerto Rico Takes On the Disaster Capitalists Book by Naomi Klein

[Video: The Battle for Paradise: Naomi Klein Reports from Puerto Rico](#)

Independent article: [Trump 'tried to cut off' disaster relief money for Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria](#)