



Bridges to Community

building communities, changing lives

Trip Organizer's Handbook

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Frequently Asked Questions:

What Is Bridges To Community?

We are a nonprofit organization that brings volunteers to impoverished communities to work, learn and reflect. Since 1993, thousands of volunteers have traveled with us to change the lives of families and build and strengthen local communities. We are currently working in Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic.

Who Goes On A Bridges Trip?

Our volunteers are an incredibly diverse group of individuals, including family groups, collections of friends, high school and college students, business professionals, executives from various industries, members of faith-based organizations and medical schools. The minimum age for participants is 12 (middle school students ages 12-14 must be accompanied by a parent or guardian) high school students 14 -17 must be accompanied by a designated adult chaperone (a person over 18) and there is no maximum age!

What Are The Trips Like?

Our volunteers live in dormitory-style housing, eat local foods, and work side-by-side with community members. There are no TVs or computers! After a day of working on your project, you might play soccer with local children, read, play cards or just relax and reflect on the experience. Your trip will also include time to tour and experience the history and beauty of the country you visit.

Read our Testimonials Here: <https://bridgestocommunity.org/testimonials/>

What Kind Of Projects Do We Work On?

Volunteers might be involved in building a home, a school, a community center, a water project, a smoke-reducing stove, a latrine, or working in a clinic. Our medical groups participate in public health workshops, projects and work in clinic. All of our projects offer the satisfaction of improving the health, well-being and future of a child, a family, or an entire community.

What Are The Trip Costs?

The current cost of a trip is \$1395 per volunteer, plus airfare. Two week trips are \$1,800.00. Trip fees cover the expenses of the volunteer while in country, including housing, food, transportation, and tourist activities, and also help offset our costs for running our programs. Additional donations for the “project” you will be working on are welcome and will be discussed in the fundraising section of this handbook.

Depending on your preference, you can book your own airline ticket or you can have Bridges to Community’s travel agent make a reservation for you. There are some real benefits if you book as a group. Doing it yourself or using our travel agent, you will pay for your flights at a later date, your volunteers will be traveling together and you do not need the names of volunteers and it is also possible to change names of the volunteers on your trip list up to 72 hours in advance of the trip. If you book your own flights, you pay for your ticket immediately, there are no name changes possible and we recommend taking out a Trip Cancellation Insurance to protect your investment, as changes almost always result in additional fees.

What Size Is A Typical Group?

Groups range in size from a minimum of ten (10) to twenty-two (22) volunteers. If you group is smaller than 10, we will look to pair your trip with a similar group traveling at the same time or you can pay the additional missing trip fees.

How Do I Organize A Trip? Just ask Bridges!

Your first step is to make the decision that you want to be part of a life-changing experience. The rest is simple: Bridges will help with every other step of organizing your trip.

Trip Organization 101:

Perhaps you have already experienced the magic of a Bridges trip and you are eager to share that experience with friends, family and coworkers. Or perhaps this is your first Bridges trip, either way, this section will guide you through the process of organizing a trip.

Getting Started

- Complete and submit the Trip Reservation Form so that BTC knows your plans
- <https://bridgestocommunity.org/files/BTC-Trip-Reservation-Form.pdf>
- Select trip dates that are 9 – 12 months in advance to allow volunteers to “Save the Dates”
- Identify the network you are going to recruit trip participants from
- Contact those potential volunteers on a repeated basis, sharing the links to the trip and to register on the BTC website and pay their deposits
- Identify airlines and flights that you would like the group to use and share that information with the them. If booking flights individually, monitor the cost of the flights you choose, so that your group can take advantage of “sales” that periodically occur. Groups should make every attempt possible to arrive and depart inside a two-hour window of each other.
- Create a fundraising plan to support the cost of the project the group will be working on
- Communicate regularly with the BTC New York office so you know who has signed up
- Schedule at least one pre-trip meeting to prepare your group for the trip

Select Trip Dates

The standard Bridges trip is nine days long (from a Saturday to a Sunday), although we do have options for longer trips. Your first step should be to contact Rusty Pedersen, Vice President of Volunteer Services at the Bridges to Community office to select dates for your trip. Please be flexible, especially if you plan to travel during our peak vacation weeks (i.e., school vacations).

Create A Plan To Recruit Trip Participants

You should begin by making a plan that includes:

- Who you hope to recruit (friends, family, fellow students or work colleagues)
- How you intend to communicate with them (email invites, Facebook groups, school newsletters, meetings)
- What you plan to say: Outline your “talking points”. In addition to information about Bridges, you may include an overview of information about the country you will visit, and the project(s) you will be working on. Contact our staff for more information.
- A timeline for each phase of pre-trip planning: Organizing a Bridges trip generally begins about nine months in advance as you need ample time to identify and meet with potential participants, they need to allocate sufficient time off from work/school, conduct pre-trip orientation meetings, book airfares and plan and undertake fundraising efforts.

Volunteer Handbook: Bridges has a Volunteer Handbook available on our website to help prepare your group as well: <https://bridgestocommunity.org/files/BTC-VolunteerHandbook.pdf>

Create A Fundraising Plan

Many groups elect to raise funds to pay for their trip fees and to support the project they will be working on (house construction, school, community center, medicines). If you plan to have your group fundraise, it is important to:

- Identify fundraising goals, how much do you want to raise?
- Share that with your group and provide them with regular updates on their progress
- Outline plans for raising funds; online, in your community, through family networks
- Refer to the “Guide to Fundraising” on Bridges’ website for more ideas or see below.
- <https://bridgestocommunity.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Fundraising-Guide.pdf>

Planning Tips:

Youth Groups

Communication - Plan an initial meeting that includes youth, and parents or guardians. This allows you to share trip details, answer questions and collect parent/guardian contact information. Create a communication system that continues to keep all parties informed before, during and after the trip.

Fund Raising

Record Keeping – It is very important that you develop a system for tracking funds prior to the start of your fundraising efforts. (Bridges staff can help you with this.) Your system should include a way of clearly differentiating funds collected for participants’ trip fees and money raised for group projects. Although Bridges will send you periodic reports detailing the money received for your group, it is important that as the trip organizer you maintain accurate records for cross checking.

Program Planning

Contact Program Staff – Approximately four to five months prior to your group’s departure you may want to contact Bridges staff in the community in which you will be working. This will allow you the opportunity to learn more about the community, discuss specific group interests, and plan group activities.

Guide To Fundraising:

The thought of fundraising \$1,500 to \$5,000 may seem like a daunting task. It doesn’t have to be, though. Keep in mind that your passion and enthusiasm about your upcoming trip is your best sales tool. Harness that energy and use it to support your fundraising efforts. Here are some tips to guide you.

Getting Started

- Be confident; believe in your cause and others will too.
- Share your enthusiasm; it’s infectious.
- Seek support; enlist family and friends to help.
- Make a plan; outline your goals and timeline.
- **ASK, ASK, ASK**; if you don’t ask, no one will give.

Make A List of Contacts

- Family
- Friends
- Community Groups
- Sports teams
- Religious Organizations
- Local Businesses

Spread The News

- Send letters and/or emails about your upcoming Bridges trip asking for support from your family, friends and associations.
- Make presentations to school clubs, business associations, etc.
- Post information about your trip on Facebook, Instagram or other Social Media sites.

Organize Fundraising Events

- Tag Sale
- Bake Sale
- Buy a Brick Campaign
- Battle of the Bands
- Car Wash
- Auction
- Dance Marathon
- Tabling at shopping centers, college quads, dining halls, churches, etc.

Utilize Online Fundraising

The volunteers can gather donations to cover the project costs **by setting up a compelling web page** on www.FirstGiving.com. This allows each volunteer to easily tell others where and how to donate to their cause.

You, the trip coordinator, must decide first: Do you want to set up a group donation web page and share the donations, OR have each individual set up their own? Speak with Bridges staff to get our recommendations, if you wish.

Group Donation Web Page:

Call Bridges and ask us to set up a page (“Campaign”) for your group. We will tell you the URL for your page that you can distribute to donors.

Your volunteers have the option of setting up personal pages *within the campaign* if tracking donations that way is desired. If you choose to do this, have them each:

1. Go to <https://bridgestocommunity.org/support-us/first-giving/>
2. On the right, find your group’s name and click on it.
3. On the right, click on the blue box “Fundraise”.
4. In the next few screens, provide all the information requested.
 - Add a Photo to make it personal and fun

- For “Your Story”, write it from the heart, and keep it short, and feel free to borrow text from our website : <https://bridgestocommunity.org/category/stories/>
5. After you Submit all the input, the First Giving site will give you the URL that you can distribute to donors.

Individual Donation Web Page:

Volunteers may individually want to fundraise without group participation. Here are the steps:

1. Go to <https://bridgestocommunity.org/support-us/first-giving> .
2. On the right, click on the blue “Start Fundraising” bar.
3. See the “Select Your Event” box. At the bottom, select “Create your fundraising page”.
4. In the next few screens, provide all the information requested.
 - a. When asked, select “Create a new campaign” and “I’m doing my own thing”
 - b. The “Name” of your page should include YOUR name, such as “Jane Doe’s Page”
 - c. Add a Photo to make it personal and fun
 - d. For “Your Story”, write it from the heart, but feel free to borrow text from our website at <https://bridgestocommunity.org/category/stories/>
5. After you Submit all the input, the First Giving site will give you the URL that you can distribute to donors.

Use Of Bridges To Community’s Name And Logo

- **Please identify yourselves** as an independent group fundraising for Bridges to Community. For example state that: “Rivertown School is raising money for Bridges to Community projects” instead of “Rivertown School’s Bridges to Community.”
- **Do not alter the Bridges logo** or combine it with your graphics, logo, name or other design elements including making t-shirts, hats or other items for sale.
- **We will be happy to provide you** with literature or help to create materials to assist you with your fundraising.

Donation Procedures

- **Let us know** before you start fundraising so that we can be ready to accept and track your donations.
- **Receipts:** Please note that only Bridges to Community can issue receipts for donations, and only donations made directly to Bridges qualify as charitable contributions. Gifts- in-kind (goods or services) can only be donated to Bridges.
- **Checks and Cash:** Please have all checks made payable to “Bridges to Community.” If the check is not made payable to Bridges, we are unable to deposit it. If you collect cash, have donors complete a donation form so we can send them a thank you and a receipt.
- **Credit Cards:** Bridges can accept Am Ex, Visa and MasterCard transactions as long as we receive a signed donation form which says (a) how much the donation is for; (b) what group and/or project the donation is supporting; (c) the donor’s name and address; and (d) the credit card account number and expiration date.
- **Send donations to the Bridges to Community office:** 95 Croton Avenue, Ossining, NY 10562
- **Online donations:** Donors may also contribute to your fundraising through our website (<https://bridgestocommunity.org/support-us/donate>). In the “note” section of the gift, they should write your name or the name of your group.

- **Firstgiving.com:** Bridges encourages groups to use this online service which allows them to set up their own personalized fundraising page (see section above).
- **Thank you notes:** In addition to thanking your donors in a letter or email, you might follow up with photos or a letter with highlights from your trip.
- **Please note that all donations are non-refundable.**

Questions and Help

If you have questions or need assistance, please contact the Bridges to Community offices:
info@bridgestocommunity.org – ph: 914-923-2200.