



# Bridges to Community

## Volunteer Handbook



*Everything you need to know  
to prepare for your  
Bridges to Community experience!*

# Welcome to Bridges!

## Table of Contents

- 3.....What to Expect
- 4.....What to Pack
- 5.....Spending Money
- 6.....Gifts/Donations
- 7.....Fundraising
- 8.....Health and Safety
- 9.....Travel Tips
- 10.....Bridges Policies
- 11.....Extra Resources

Congratulations on taking the first steps toward a life changing experience! This packet will provide you with all of the basic information you need to have a safe, well-prepared, and incredible Bridges to Community trip.

Our staff in New York and in-country are here to assist you as you prepare for your trip, but we ask that you review and become familiar with all of the information in this packet. It includes important information on packing, Bridges policies, fundraising, how to handle unexpected travel changes, and more. It is going to be a busy, emotional, and absolutely wonderful week!

**Bridges to Community**  
95 Croton Avenue  
Ossining, NY 10562

914.923.2200

**communications@**  
**bridgestocommunity.**  
**org**







*Each group has a designated communication liaison who will inform volunteers' family members that the group has arrived safely.*



## What to Expect

Whether this is your first time traveling or not, there are new things in store for you. Be prepared to challenge yourself, step outside of your comfort zone, learn new things, and meet new people.

### Here are some things you can expect:

- You will be staying in a rural community, sleeping on cots, using a latrine toilet (outhouse) and using buckets (not running water) to shower during most of the trip.
- You will be eating food that is most likely different from what you are used to--rice, beans, and some vegetables--so prepare for your stomach to act differently at times. (Always let our staff know if you do not feel well)
- You will be hot. With only some exception, Nicaragua and the DR are hot all year round. Stay hydrated and work at your own pace. Construction work can be demanding, so make sure to take breaks and don't try to over-do it.

# What to Pack

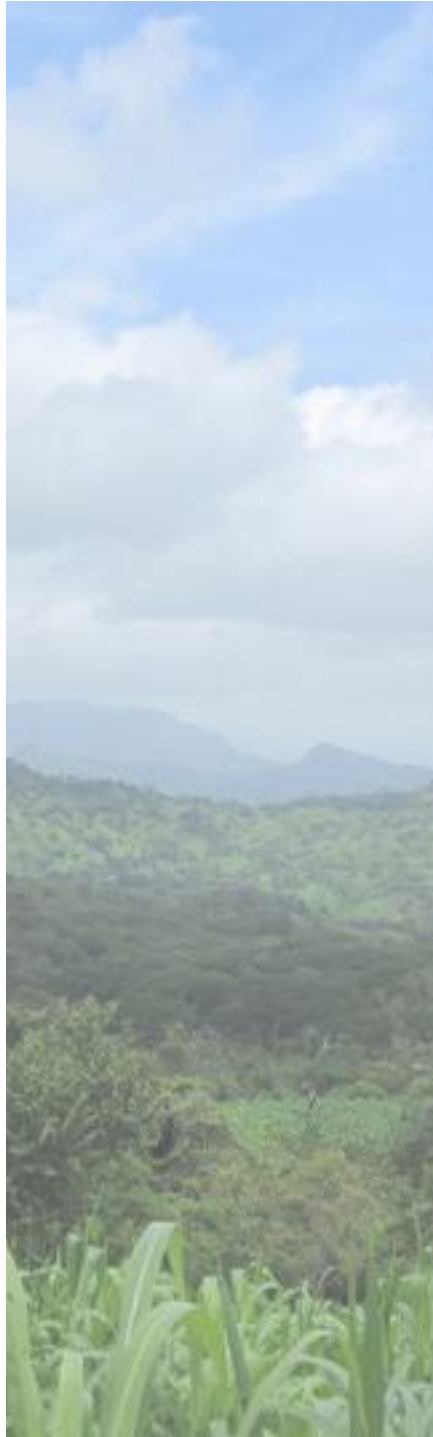


**To enter Nicaragua or the DR you will need:**

- ✓ **Your passport**
- ✓ **\$10 in US cash for the visa fee (paid upon arrival in airport)**

- Twin sheet set and pillowcase**
- Towel**
- Lightweight blanket (for the DR and Jinotega)**
- Lightweight sweater or jacket (for DR and Jinotega or other sites if traveling in Nov or Dec)**
- Work clothes, a few lightweight tshirts, two pairs of pants, jeans or knee-length shorts that CAN GET DIRTY)**
- Comfortable jeans/shorts and 2 shirts for non-work days**
- Sturdy shoes or work boots**
- Flip-flops for showering**
- Sneakers for walking**
- Comfortable socks/underwear**
- Swimsuit**
- Toiletries (shampoo/conditioner in one, tampons/sanitary napkins, louffe to scrub off dirt and cement, etc.)**
- SUN SCREEN**
- INSECT REPELLENT**
- Flashlight with batteries**
- Ear plugs (if light sleeper)**
- Water bottle**
- 2 pairs of work gloves**
- Hat/bandana for sun protection**





***Many volunteers appreciate the time away from their cell phones and look forward to "disconnecting." It allows the group and community to spend more quality time together.***

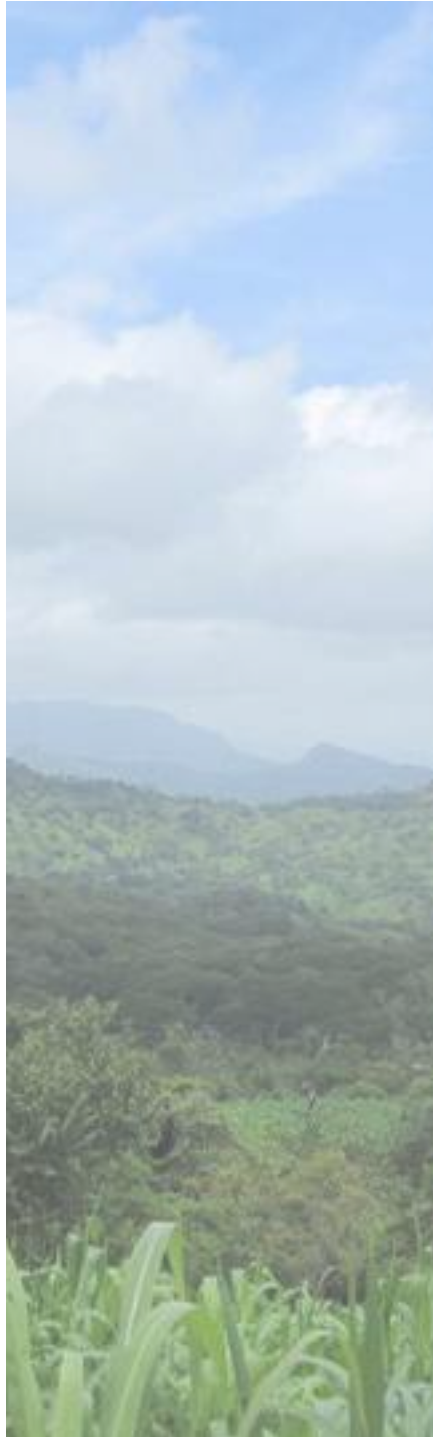
## Valuable Items

We take many precautions to ensure that volunteers' belongings are well protected, but we do ask that you pack simply and sensibly. If you decide to bring items with you like cell phones or tablets, those items can be given over to Bridges staff to be kept in our office safe once you arrive. If you choose to keep those items with you, please keep a close watch on them and do not leave them lying around. We are not responsible for lost or stolen items.



## Spending Money

We will provide for all of your basic needs while on our trip. There will be a couple of opportunities on your trip, however, to purchase extra snacks, beverages and/or souvenirs. For trips to Nicaragua, you can bring small US bills with you that have no tears or writing on them. For trips to the DR, your spending money will have to be changed to the local currency. Our staff will happily assist you.



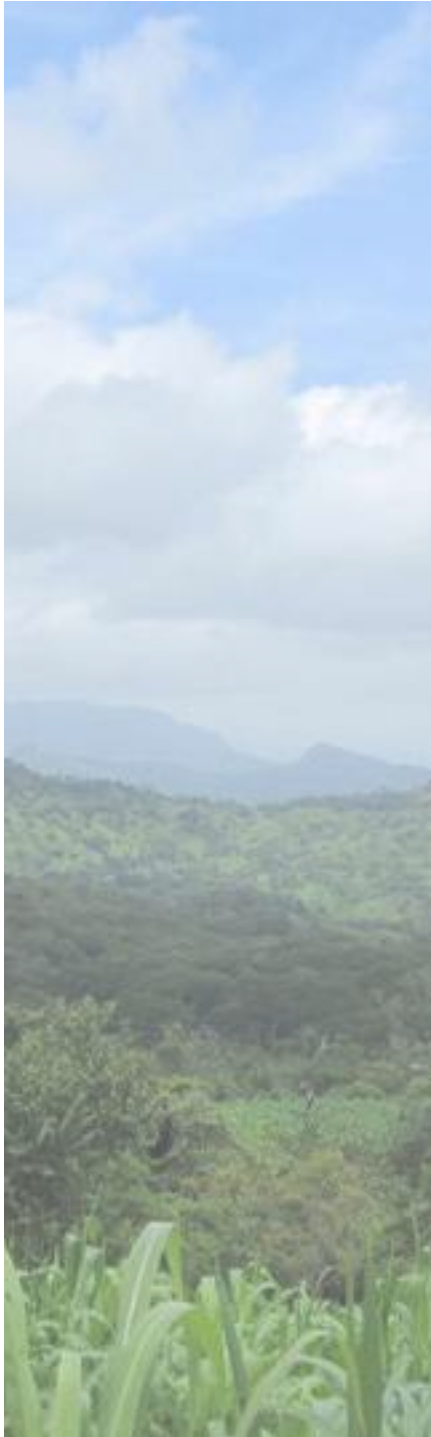
## Donations/Gift-Giving Policies

It is normal to want to pass along gifts to individuals you get to know within the local community; however, we want to ensure that everyone in the communities we work with is treated fairly, that expectations that cannot always be met are not created, and that we focus on what we all share, rather than what we have or do not have. We therefore ask that you do not hand out gifts while you are in the community.



**For more information email:  
communications@  
bridgestocommunity.org**

Many volunteers like to bring down toys, coloring books, and other items to use with the children of the community. We ask that you use the items with the children, then collect them at the end of your stay, and pass them over to our in-country staff, along with any other items you would like to donate. Our staff will then work with all of the communities to make sure that the items go where they are most needed. You can also ask us ahead of time for a list of items the community needs.



## Fundraising For Your Trip

Fundraising is a great way to help you get excited for your trip, while also letting friends and family know about a cause you believe in. For that reason, many volunteers do fundraising to raise money for the project they will be working on in Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic, such as a house or a latrine, as the project cost is not covered by your trip fees. There are many ways to fundraise, from bake sales and house parties to online requests. We offer our volunteers the option of using FirstGiving, a site that allows you to set up your own personal fundraising page to share with others via email, Facebook, etc.



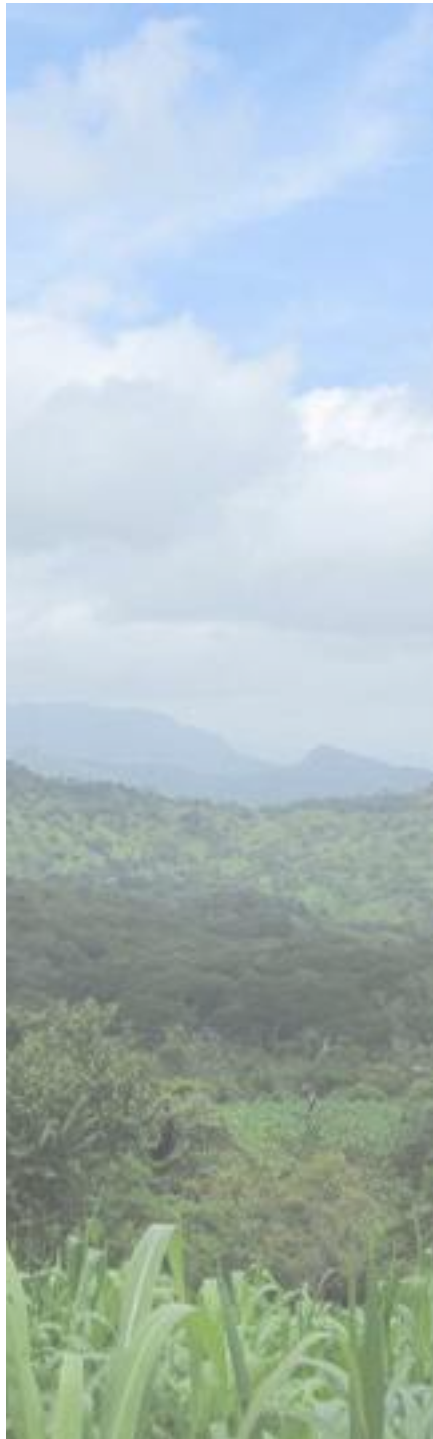
When your supporters donate on your page, it is automatically applied to your account, and we will send them a receipt and thank you. This is a very easy way to support your project.

**See our steps on how to use First Giving:**

[www.bridgestocommunity.org/firstgivingsteps](http://www.bridgestocommunity.org/firstgivingsteps)

If you need assistance setting up your fundraising page, or want more fundraising ideas, please contact our Development Officer, Jeanine Racioppo at 914.923.2200 ext. 12, or [jeanine.racioppo@bridgestocommunity.org](mailto:jeanine.racioppo@bridgestocommunity.org)





## Health and Safety

Bridges to Community takes the health and safety of our volunteers very seriously. Our staff is fully trained in First Aid, and our kitchen staff receive training annually in hygienic food preparation. We supply purified water at all dormitory and work sites, and a well-stocked medical kit. We also carry emergency evacuation medical insurance in the unlikely event that it is needed. All of our sites have emergency evacuation plans.

### Safety Guidelines

- ❶ *Before you arrive:* Consult with the Center for Disease Control ([www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel)) and your doctor for any immunizations or other health info you may need while in country.
- ❷ Do not consume any food or beverages that have not been ok'd by trip leaders (this includes fruits, veggies, packaged and prepared foods).
- ❸ Drink lots of purified water and use sunblock.
- ❹ Use insect repellent.
- ❺ Do not touch or play with any cats, dogs, or other animals.
- ❻ Do not walk or run alone.





# Travel Tips and Troubleshooting

As much as we aspire to have everything go smoothly, sometimes unexpected issues beyond our control arise. Here are a few tips:

- If you miss your flight or connecting flight, try to contact the airline before the scheduled departure time to receive the most assistance from the airline.
- If your arrangements were made through TZELL group, you can contact Harold Silverman at 212-944-2121 #2234 during office hours and Rusty Pedersen at 845-304-2002 any other time.
- Once new arrangements are made, contact your group leader and/or Bridges Associate Director, Rusty Pedersen, at 845-304-2002 or Communications Manager, Christine Goffredo, at 561-862-7586.
- On your customs form when you enter Nicaragua or the DR, you can list your foreseen address as:

*For trips going to Jinotega and Siuna:*

-Best Western Las Mercedes, frente al aeropuerto

*For trips going to Masaya and Nindiri:*

-El Raizon Hotel, Km. 20.3 Carretera a Masaya

*For trips going anywhere in the DR:*

-San Juan de la Maguana, Wenceslao Ramirez #40, casa esquina, 27 de febrero

## Other Emergency Contacts:

**Kenia Ramirez,**  
**Nicaragua Country Director:**

**505-8856-2184**

**Jorge Montero, DR Country Co-Director:**

**829-259-1555**

**Christina Balint, DR Country Co-Director:**

**829-259-1553**



# Bridges Policies

We strive to ensure that all of our volunteers have the best possible experience on their Bridges to Community trip. For your safety, and that of your fellow volunteers, we ask that you abide by the following policies:

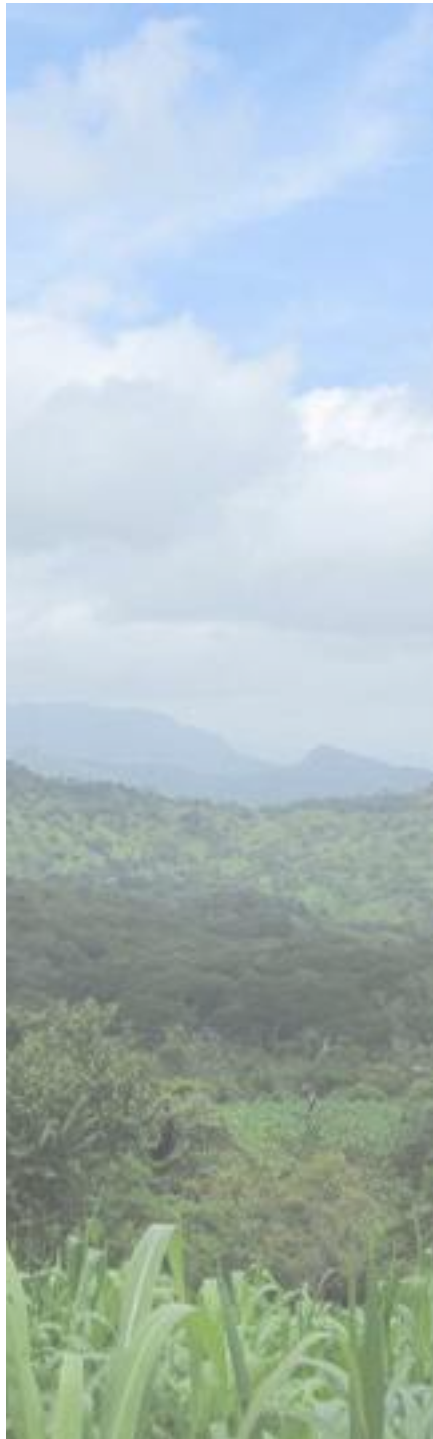
*Bridges to Community reserves the right, as outlined on our application form, to dismiss volunteers from our program at our sole discretion.*

**Drugs:** Use of illegal drugs is not tolerated. Individuals found to be using or in possession of illegal drugs will be asked to leave the group immediately. Fees associated with returning home early will be charged to the individual.

**Alcohol:** The Bridges experience is about building relationships and trust within a community. Alcohol use while in the community can create a negative image of volunteers, undermine the intentions of our work, and contribute to destructive behavior in the communities. Therefore, the use of alcohol is prohibited during our stay in the community. When not in the community, we strongly encourage moderation and discretion for those over 21 who choose to consume alcohol. For those under 21 or traveling with a college/university, alcohol consumption is not allowed at any time.

**Inappropriate Relationships:** Sexual contact between volunteers and members of the local community or Bridges staff is not permitted.





Contact our Communications Manager with any questions or concerns:  
[communications@bridgestocommunity.org](mailto:communications@bridgestocommunity.org)



## Extra Resources

You can find more information on our website including:

- ✓ Spanish language (country specific) tips
- ✓ Advice from former volunteers
- ✓ Reading lists to brush up on Nica and DR info
- ✓ Updates on our projects
- ✓ Bridges Families and Staff Highlights
- ✓ And more!

## We are very social

Join a community of volunteers to share and see photos and stories—even before your trip!



[www.facebook.com/bridgestocommunity](http://www.facebook.com/bridgestocommunity)



[www.instagram.com/bridgestocommunity](http://www.instagram.com/bridgestocommunity)



[www.twitter.com/btc\\_volunteers](http://www.twitter.com/btc_volunteers)



[www.linkedin.com/company/bridges-to-community](http://www.linkedin.com/company/bridges-to-community)  
[#bridgestocommunity](https://www.linkedin.com/company/bridges-to-community)