

Americas Association for the
care of Children's

Nicaragua

Service Learning Trip Manual
2009

contents

This project manual contains information with regard to your upcoming project. Please take the time to read it thoroughly. It is designed to enhance your experience and better prepare you for your project. The manual contains specific information about travel preparation, health and medical issues, and details about the area to which you will be traveling. If you have any questions about this project information, please contact your Project Leader. **BE SURE TO TAKE THIS PROJECT MANUAL WITH YOU TO NICARAGUA**, so that you have the information, emergency numbers, etc. you need.

- **Page 2** **Definition of Service-Learning**
- **Page 4** **Introduction to Service-learning projects**
- **Page 6** **Nicaragua Site Information**
 - About the Site
 - Helpful Websites
 - Site Briefing
- **Page 11** **Map of Nicaragua**
- **Page 12** **Cultural Sensitivity**
- **Page 14** **Travel Preparation**
 -
- **Page 17** **Checklist**
 - What to Bring
 - What Not to Bring
- **Page 18** **Medical and Insurance Issues**
- **Page 20** **Beyond the Project**
- **Page 21** **Tear-Out Sheet for Families**

definition of service-learning

At the heart of the mission and learning goals lies the value of civic engagement – encouraging delegates to live energetic, engaged and enlightened lives; in exploring local and global citizenship; and practicing the arts of democracy. To this end, delegates are encouraged to develop critical thinking skills, broad vision, effective communications, a sense of the inter-relatedness of all knowledge, sensitivity to the human condition, and a global perspective. In addition, delegates are encouraged to value a lifelong commitment to service. The trip to Jalapa seeks to challenge delegates to “think critically and act compassionately” by service-learning and course-based service-learning, providing delegates the opportunity to continue to deepen their sense of civic engagement and to further develop their commitment to service.

A Few Core Elements

Fundamental to service programs and initiatives are these values:

- ♦ ***Community Partnerships and Reciprocity:*** We believe that partnerships should be mutually beneficial. The community agency/partner, faculty member and AACC work together to plan and implement experiences so that equitable attention is paid to the community’s needs and the educational value for the delegate participants. The Americas Association for the Care of Children, (AACC) has a sister relationship with schools and villages of Jalapa and works with the citizens of Jalapa, Nicaragua to bring education to the marginalized population, using both formal and informal strategies. We are fortunate to have forged a longstanding relationship with many community members of Jalapa, Nicaragua. The goal of the organization has been to promote friendship and understanding between the peoples of the two countries by developing programs of personal exchange and support through small community development projects. To accomplish this AACC arranges for delegations from Boulder, Colorado to visit Nicaragua and people from Jalapa to visit Colorado.
- ♦ ***Reflection:*** As is often recognized and discussed, service is not politically neutral, simple, or a common ground for the many perspectives found in our world. Rather, service brings individuals together in forums for community development and action and challenges some to wrestle with why “service” is needed. Ongoing reflection on the service, the population being served and related social issues facilitate the deepest level of learning.
- ♦ ***Sharing:*** Sharing of the experiences as a report to a community partner, school or with a friend, or publicity via community forums or presentations, sharing provides a sense of closure for the experience.

Delegate Service-Learning

Service-Learning offers the opportunity for delegates to engage meaningfully with community initiatives on their own time, while offering carefully designed support systems that encourage a deeper exploration of community issues and beliefs about the practice and meaning of service. Elements include:

- ♦ ***Delegate Leadership:*** Delegates can only be active in community life with a strong compassionate voice and action, embedding community work in the culture of our communities. Delegates find voice and the power to find solutions for issues that are important to them, educating, challenging and encouraging their peers to continually explore community work, advocacy and change.
- ♦ ***Active Learning:*** Delegates choose how broadly and/or deeply to explore community issues through their service work, whether it be through structured experiences or engaging in a self-initiated partnership project.

Course-Based Service-Learning

Course-based service-learning is the integration of meaningful service experiences into courses with the intention to enhance delegate learning while addressing one or more community-identified social issues.

- ♦ ***Relevance to the course*** – service experiences are considered a “text” through which course concepts can be learned. Accordingly, projects are intentionally chosen with regard to their relevance to course objectives, and the service-learning is woven *as much as possible* throughout the course.

Multiple Opportunities for Service and Learning

The strength of civic engagement opportunities for delegates lies in the complementary nature in which co-curricular and course-based service-learning are implemented. There is recognition of the potential of powerful learning offered through such experiences, with the ultimate goal to challenge delegates to go beyond “doing good” and truly engage in their community and the work to ensuring social justice.

We ask that you come prepared to be flexible. Plans may change from day to day, and it is sometimes hard to stay on a fixed schedule while on a service-learning project.

intro to service-learning projects

*“If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time.
But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine,
then let us work together.”*

~ ABORIGINAL WOMAN

The goal of each service-learning project is to foster a dialogue between the delegate and the host community around issues of poverty and social justice. By working alongside people and sharing their stories, delegates learn about themselves and the world.

There are seven underlying philosophies and approaches to each service-learning project. Each contributes to the understanding of community and the role of the individual within it.

- **IMMERSION.** The experience of being in a community.
- **SERVICE.** Participating fully in a community-identified project.
- **LEARNING.** Examining community development, poverty, and social justice issues and how communities respond to those issues.
- **RECIPROCITY.** Both the community and the project participants work together to plan and implement the experiences so that equitable attention is paid to the community’s needs and educational value for the delegate participants.
- **ASSET MODEL.** The community is not a place of “problems to be fixed.” Rather, strengths exist upon which to be built.
- **REFLECTION.** Connecting the action with theory – what is it that we have learned? How does this inform my future community involvement?
- **COMFORT ZONES.** AACC or project leaders will never knowingly put participants in real danger. However, we will gladly put them in situations where they will be highly uncomfortable.

Each project consists of four equally important stages: orientation, class, experience, and reflection. In combination, the four stages can project a powerful educational experience.

- *The orientation educates participants about culture, history, group dynamics, experiential learning, and more. Without proper orientation, the experience is severely weakened.*

- *The class offers theory and a foundation on which to learn about culture, social justice, and the effects of poverty.*
- *The experience supports what was discussed in orientation and class and provides a hands-on context for powerful learning. Without the experience, the orientation and reflection lose their reasons for being.*
- *Reflection ties it all together, connecting learning and experience, so both are richer and more meaningful. Without critical reflection, the experience remains an unprocessed activity.*

The program is built on the recognition of equal dignity and humanity of all persons, no matter what their circumstances. Hence, the local people at the project site, the delegates, and the leaders are all servers and served; they all teach and learn from each other. Service-learning projects are tools for changing delegates from observers into active participants and giving them a way to engage with people and ideas whom they would otherwise have little or no contact. Because of the nature of service-learning projects, the human relationships established with the people at the project sites are paramount. The service-learning project is committed to building two-way bridges between the persons at project sites and the participants, so that the benefits are reciprocal and continuing.

nicaragua site information

About the Site

Nicaragua is the largest country in Central America with a population of roughly 5.5 million people. About 42% of the population is under 15 years of age. The life expectancy is 69 years of age. The literacy rate is 66%. The land is vastly deforested leaving much of the land without water. Jalapa, Nicaragua is situated in the north central highlands of Nicaragua bordering Honduras. It is a mountainous region that was once covered with forests. Tobacco, coffee for export and rice, beans and other crops for internal use are grown in the valleys of Jalapa. Jalapa's younger population is slightly higher than the country's and the literacy rate slightly lower.

Helpful Web Sites

The following web sites will be helpful in learning about Nicaraguan history, culture, travel advisories, health issues, etc. If you find additional web sites that are useful, please pass them on to your group and to AACC, so that we can include them in future publications of this manual.

HISTORY & COUNTRY INFORMATION

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| About Nicaragua | http://library.thinkquest.org/17749/ |
| Nicaragua Information | http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/ca/nicaragua |
| Nicanet | http://www.nicanet.org |
| AACC | http://www.aaccchildren.net |

HEALTH & TRAVEL INFORMATION

| | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Center for Disease Control | http://www.cdc.gov/travel/camerica.htm#vaccines |
| US State Department | http://state.gov (click on Travel and Living Abroad, then Travel |

Warnings)

Site Briefing

You should expect to experience a different culture in Nicaragua. Please read the following materials carefully. They explain Nicaraguan and AACC cultural expectations of personal appearance, housing, host families, history, and food, among others.

PERSONAL APPEARANCE

Most people (in any culture) form an initial impression based upon dress and overall appearance. It is important that you respect the customs of your host country with regard to your personal appearance. You will see a range of dress in the communities you visit. Many Latin American children wear shorts, go without shirts, run around in their underwear, or wear nothing at all. Of course, that type of appearance is not appropriate for a visitor. Keep in mind that you are a representative of Boulder and teenagers from the USA from the moment you depart Boulder until the day you return.

Conservative dress is most appropriate.

Women should wear lightweight pants, Capri pants, skirts/dresses at or below the knee. Shorts should be just above the knee or mid-thigh. Daisy Duke shorts are not appropriate. It is most appropriate to wear t-shirts or blouses (sleeveless is fine) that are full-length (no mid-drifts) and not revealing in any way (such as plunging v-necks or bra straps showing). Women in Nicaragua wear capped sleeves and flowing skirts or a tank dress. Clothing should not be of the workout variety, no belly buttons showing, no tight clothes, etc. NO workout gear. T-shirts should be in good condition without inappropriate messages. Women should always wear a bra, as it is considered vulgar when one is not worn.

Men in Nicaragua commonly wear t-shirts (in good condition without inappropriate messages) or button-down, short-sleeve cotton shirts. Shorts just above the knee are appropriate as are pants or jeans, though you will rarely see Nicaraguan men wearing shorts in public. One should refrain from wearing muscle shirts.

Sneakers with good tread are necessary. You will at times be traveling on dirt roads and visiting pueblos and barrios that do not have access to waste systems, so always wear good shoes to protect your feet.

HOST FAMILIES

You may feel awkward at first with your host family. Be flexible, relax, and try to fall into the flow of the family. This may well be the most rewarding part of your stay in Nicaragua. You will be forming a relationship with the core unit of Nicaraguan culture — something that goes beyond meetings and sightseeing. If you do not speak Spanish, you will discover that you can successfully communicate nonverbally through gestures, hand signs, and smiles. If the family members' names are difficult to remember, have them write the names down. Play games with the kids (paint and draw, jump rope, marbles, jacks, card games, etc). Bring pictures of your family to share with your Nicaraguan family. Offer to help out around the house; for example, have them show you how to wash clothes or make tortillas. Often there are three generations living together under the same roof. Frequently there are no adult men living in the home.

FOOD

Let your Project Leader know if you have special dietary needs (i.e. vegetarian eaters, diabetic, food allergies, etc.). Beans, rice, and tortillas are the staple foods of every Nicaraguan household. You may receive this food for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. On occasion, you might receive eggs as a guest. Chicken and pork are common meats (don't be surprised if there is one less chicken or pig in the courtyard when you come home). Common fruits you will receive are plantains, bananas, oranges, melon, and mangos, depending on the season. Cheese, cuahada, may be served on the side and is very different from American cheese. It is fresh, mild and soft. As guests, you may receive Coke, Tang, water, or

fresh fruit juice. It is inappropriate not to try food or to visibly show dislike for food. Cultural sensitivity requires that you show respect and participate in sampling cultural foods.

WATER

The water in Nicaragua contains different microbes than American water. While city water is safe for small amounts of use, be sure to drink bottled water and other bottled drinks in all rural areas. Avoid ice cubes in glasses (drink directly out of the bottle using a straw). If you purchase a bottled drink from a store or restaurant, as an extra precaution, be sure the drink is opened within your view. Don't drink juices mixed with tap water. When brushing your teeth, use bottled or filtered water. Avoid produce that has been washed in tap water, unless you can peel off the outer layer. **MOST IMPORTANTLY: STAY HYDRATED.** The weather in Jalapa will be hot, so it is important that you drink a sufficient amount of water each day to stay well hydrated. Be sure to have a large water bottle with you at all times.

HOUSING

Your Nicaraguan project leader will pre-arrange housing according to the focus of the project and community interests. Accommodations will be with local families who have prior connection with AACC projects. The homes are rustic, compared to U.S. standards. Most homes are adobe brick, cinderblock or corrugated metal structures with a large main room, perhaps one or two bedrooms, and a courtyard. Flooring in the homes could be dirt or concrete, with dirt courtyards. During the dry season, houses can be quite dusty, even though they are wet-mopped daily. During the rainy season mud may be prevalent. Courtyards can also be home to several chickens and pigs. The furniture usually consists of rocking chairs, straight-backed chairs, a table, a cot, perhaps a hammock, and a TV. Several generations can live in the same home. The noise level may be higher than you are accustomed to. Earplugs can be helpful for sleeping.

Bathroom facilities range from flushable toilets to latrines. Toilet paper is not thrown into toilet bowls and flushed because it blocks the sewer system and clogs the toilet. Get in the habit of throwing toilet paper in the garbage, not the toilet. It is highly recommended that participants NOT sit directly on a latrine, even with disposable toilet covers. Participants should squat over a latrine. Infections are commonly caught from latrines and can be quite severe, but preventable.

Don't waste water when bathing. This is a precious commodity, and we need to respect that by taking short showers and few baths. Wear sandals while in the shower. The project leader can provide further guidelines for bathing.

Cockroaches, mice, and other pests are common visitors to homes in Nicaragua, no matter how clean they are kept. They usually come out at night or are seen in the latrines. Carry your flashlight with you at night if that helps you feel more comfortable, especially for late night trips to the bathroom. At a flash of light, many critters scurry away. If you have any food in your room, be sure to keep it stored in closed plastic containers, or you will be inviting these critters to pay you a late night visit. Insects, especially mosquitoes and flies, are prevalent. See *Preventing Insect Bites* in the Medical Issues section.

Please remember that as a guest, you are probably receiving the best that this family owns. They may sacrifice their own food or comfort, including giving up their beds, to provide for you. Be sure to show much appreciation in return for their hospitality. This can be done by thanking them, participating in daily chores around the homes, playing with the children, and asking questions about their thoughts and lives. Listen to their stories. Communicating builds trust and shows interest.

GIFTS FOR HOST FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS

AACC supports Nicaraguan communities through organized developments projects. They ask that you do not offer money or free gifts to host families or community members. Your generosity is appreciated, but is more appropriately channeled through AACC, so as not to counteract AACC's work, or otherwise send mixed messages. Furthermore, we do not want to create a dependency or the expectation that when people from Boulder are in town, we come with money and merchandise. It is common for people, especially children, to ask you for money throughout the trip. Please say NO and explain that we are helping in their community in other ways. We encourage you to bring items to share with your host families – photos of your family/community, activities to do with the kids (coloring, cards, books in Spanish that you have read with the children, etc). If you want to bring something small (to leave a symbol from your world) you may do so, but please DO NOT make it an expensive gift.

All delegates purchase a filtron to make potable water. We give each of the host families one filtron to ensure potable water while delegates are living with them as well as to help increase the accessibility of potable water. In the event your host family already has one it will be donated to a school or other community organization in need of potable water.

PROTOCOLS FOR INTERACTION

There are certain cultural norms that are followed in various regions of Nicaragua. Here are a few suggestions for interacting with community members, host families, and speakers.

When taking photos, first ask the subjects if you can do so. Nicaraguans do not usually mind, and the kids usually love it, but it is appropriate to ask first. Simply say, "Photo"? If you have a digital camera, offer to show the subjects the display afterward.

Give an appropriate greeting when meeting and leaving people. Ask the project leaders to explain different regional forms of greeting. In the rural areas such as Jalapa, people who have just met may take each other's arms and say "mucho gusto." Always thank the people who have taken time to meet with you.

Show appropriate personal hygiene during your stay. Dress neatly, comb your hair. If chewing gum, be appropriate – no chomping or popping.

Most commerce in local markets is done by bartering. Although items may have prices lower than what you expect, you should engage in bartering. Consider how perceptions of Americans factor into this – the wealthy person can buy anything he/she wants, throwing his/her money around without bartering. So engage in bartering with vendors. Ask the site partner for guidelines, such as prices on common items.

Each presentation with community members should begin with an introduction of the group by one of our cultural mediators who accompanies us on visits throughout the country and conclude with an expression of personal thanks. Cultural mediators are an important part of learning about cultural sensitivity and respect of others. This is a unique offering provided by AACC. The introduction includes the general composition of the group and purpose of the trip; the closing is a personalized statement about what the group has learned from the person/presentation/experience. All group members should demonstrate good listening skills (eye contact, no talking or whispering among the group) and ask questions at all meetings with community members. Although a cultural mediator who translates will facilitate most meetings, make sure to direct your questions to the community members and NOT to the translator. Please remember to speak slowly and wait for the mediator/translator to finish before continuing the questions or conversation. Common questions are: what are your hopes and dreams; what do you want us to tell people from the US upon our return.

Be careful not to make promises that you/the group can't or won't keep. Be clear that you are there to learn and will share the lessons with people at home and with AACC. Think about how often people may have been told something would happen, help would be sent, money provided, and it never happened. Don't further exacerbate the impression that outsiders make empty promises. If you want to be involved in future work in Nicaragua (and we hope you will), get involved with AACC.

RESPECT FOR HISTORY IMPORTANT

Nicaragua is a highly politicized culture, much more than the United States. To discuss politics with community members, whether urban, rural, rich, or poor is to invite an unfamiliar, perhaps a loaded or intense exchange. Tread carefully and ask the Project Leader what is appropriate to discuss.

The Contra War concluded only about 20 years ago. It brought significant suffering and loss to residents of Jalapa, and Nicaragua, in general. Talk with your Project Leader about what is appropriate to ask/discuss, so as not to be disrespectful, hurtful, or too personal. Also keep in mind that the United States provided political and financial support of the war, so some resentment of the United States government will be visible.

map of nicaragua



cultural sensitivity

The term “cultural sensitivity” is an elusive one. It embodies a number of different behaviors, attitudes, and emotions that are necessary for cross-cultural understanding and a satisfying experience. Numerous studies have attempted to explain the concept of cultural sensitivity and analyze the process of it. Time is one factor. It is difficult to become fully sensitive of a culture by studying it or visiting it for a short time. Five key components to achieving cultural sensitivity during a short visitation are: awareness, respect, participation, reciprocity, and emotion. It is important to understand these components before your cross-cultural experience begins.

During your project, you will meet many people, such as your host family, community leaders, and community members. You will often be looked to as a representative of Boulder and the United States in general whether or not you are aware of it. Very little goes unnoticed when a group comes to town.

When you enter a community or agency, take time to get a feel for what is and is not appropriate. If you have any doubts about something, ask your Project Leader. Avoid the temptation to make exceptions for yourself; these exceptions may or may not be made by the people with whom you will be working and/or living.

The project includes speakers with a wide range of opinions, which guarantees that you will not agree with everyone you meet. In a discussion, you are welcome to ask hard questions, but do so with respect. When asking personal questions of others, be prepared to share something about yourself. Phrase questions thoughtfully. For example, instead of saying “How much do you earn?” or “How much is your rent?”, ask “How much do individuals in your community earn?” or “What is the typical rent for a family?”

AWARENESS

The first component of cultural sensitivity involves awareness of other cultures. Understand that it is difficult for us to imagine that there are different worlds and different ways of doing things even within our own US borders. We must open up and become keenly aware that we are creatures of culture. Our culture shapes our values, defines our priorities, and molds our personalities, both as a nation and as individuals. So as you enter this new culture, understand and realize that their values, priorities, and personalities may be different from yours. You are a visitor to their culture — do not expect them to conform to your ideas. The great challenge and excitement comes in experiencing their ways.

RESPECT

In order for any progress to be made in cross-cultural understanding, the visitor must respect the culture of his/her hosts. This does not imply agreement with or a responsibility to adopt the other culture. Rather, understand that there are many different perspectives and values in the world. It is harmful and unnecessary to judge the other culture. Accept it, learn from it, and keep an open mind. For example, it would be inappropriate to not try food or to visibly show dislike for food. Cultural sensitivity requires that you show respect and participate with a positive attitude in daily and cultural activities.

Your hosts may see things from a different perspective than you. Be aware and respectful that their conclusions may be sharply different than your intentions. For example, if you jog around the community at five o'clock in the morning in short shorts and/or a halter top, what do you imagine the community will think? Clinging tightly to your group and whispering may appear disrespectful to your hosts. You may perceive that what you are doing is harmless and should not concern them, but they may arrive at another conclusion.

RECIPROCITY:

Reciprocity is communication that is based on two-way communication, both verbal and non-verbal. It seeks to balance power between people in dialogue by recognizing that each person in the interaction is equally capable. To understand reciprocity is to distinguish the more common understanding of power as expertise or authority from the less common understanding of power as capacity or capability. Reciprocity requires acknowledging and trusting that every person involved has experience and perceptions of equal value. One recognizes that one point of view should not dominate or exclude other points of view, When interactions are reciprocal and differences are acknowledged as potential contributions, no sense of debt is incurred by the persons involved. When someone enters interactions only to give, whether knowledge, support, direction, or something else, he/she cannot acknowledge what others may have to contribute. This lack of reciprocity inhibits what might be received and the full potential of what is given. Reciprocity enriches not only the people involved, but also the outcome of their interactions.

PARTICIPATION

To become culturally sensitive participate in the daily lives with people is necessary. Participation in the culture will quickly deepen your understanding and provide you with the best possible experiences during your trip. Soon, you will find that you begin to relate to your new friends. This is demonstrated by the realization that you no longer need your wristwatch or that you actually like grits. . Participation is also a demonstration of respect.

EMOTION

The most important aspect of cultural sensitivity involves emotions. A participant might be aware that other cultures exist, have respect for those cultures, actively participate in a culture, and still not be truly sensitive. Cultural sensitivity involves a heart-felt sense of caring and giving of yourself. This will happen as you grow closer to the communities you visit. It may take several days to be comfortable enough to let down your guard and begin caring and feeling for the people around you. Any sacrifices you make will be freely offered because you genuinely care about your hosts and want them to understand the depth of your feelings for them.

travel preparations

Travel Documents

You are required to have a passport for your visit to Nicaragua You should keep your passport close to you and give a photocopy of the signature/photo page to your Project Leader. The photocopy of your passport is necessary and will aid in identification in the event you lose or misplace the original.

Expenses

The present exchange rate is \$16.8 cordobas to \$1 US. For up-to-date changes in the exchange rate, consult an international paper before your departure, or call a local banking institution.

The cost of meals, accommodations, related site visits, and all transportation has been included in the project fee. However, you may want to take extra money for souvenirs, snacks, special entertainment or performances, etc. Past participants have enjoyed buying local arts and crafts such as pottery and hammocks. The amount of extra money you take is your decision. Past participants recommend taking \$100 - \$200, being careful not to carry large amounts of money. It is recommended that you carry a modest amount of currency not traveler's checks. You should request "new" or "fresh" \$20 bills from your local bank, as it is often difficult to exchange torn, crumpled, or marked currency. On arrival, your Project leader will take you to a bank or exchange office to help you exchange currency.

Luggage

As one of our commitments to Jalapa, each year the group carries a variety of supplies from the United States to the community and brings back crafts for the AACCC Auction in April. Therefore, we ask participants to pack only one (1) checked piece of luggage and one (1) small carry-on bag, and then check one bag of medical and educational supplies. Checked baggage is limited to 70 lbs and 62 inches long. Typically duffle bags work best. Carry-ons must fit in overhead storage compartments or below the seat and can be no more than 40 lbs. Label all luggage inside and out with full name and address (including country). Keep in mind that *participants are responsible for their own luggage*, so do not pack what you cannot carry on your own!

Should you purchase any fragile items while in Nicaragua, we recommend that you pack them for the journey home in your carry-on. Many travelers have found their fragile items shattered when placed in checked luggage.

Safety

On the whole, problems with security and safety at project sites are rare. It is advisable that you know about the area to which you are traveling. We encourage you to visit the web sites listed in this manual. Participants are responsible for their own safety – keep yourself informed. Please follow these basic safety recommendations.

- Report all incidents (real or perceived) to your Project Leader. Your current and future safety may be at stake. It is important for participants to share experiences, information, concerns, observations, and ideas with the other project members.
- Do not travel or explore areas alone. Stay in lighted, public areas at night and during the day.
- Do not display cash in public view. When changing currency, using ATM, or making purchases, be discrete.
- Do not accept offers or favors from strangers. Avoid potentially compromising situations.
- Stay alert at all times. Remember, when becoming too confident or comfortable, one may drop one's guard and be vulnerable to people who do not have one's best interests in mind.
- Follow your instincts. Learn to trust yourself and how you feel. Sometimes, the only information you will have of impending problems is your "gut" feeling.
- Dress appropriately and save the designer look for home. Wear clothing that affords modesty, comfort, flexibility, and agility.
- Do not bring valuable jewelry, watches, or expensive clothing. Do not bring what you cannot afford to lose.
- Do not leave cash, cameras, or other valuable items unattended. It is always a good idea to keep valuables with you at all times.

Emergencies

Our site partner(s) and your Project Leader will be available for help in medical emergencies. Emergencies will be handled with due urgency and care. Your Project Leader will have a small, simple first aid kit, contingency funds, and medical information about you. We take every reasonable precaution to ensure your health and safety.

In case of an extreme emergency back home, your family members may contact you through an emergency contact in Nicaragua. (See info at the end of the packet). Expect to allow at least one day to make necessary arrangements for any emergency return to Boulder, plus travel time. An emergency return may incur additional costs to you, which are beyond our control.

Participant Expectations

All project participants on Service-learning projects are expected to act with the same level of responsibility, respect, and maturity as when residing at their own homes or in your community. As this is a delegate AACC program, all participants are expected to abide by the AACC policies. Should a participant's behavior jeopardize the group or site in any way during the project, the Project Leader reserves the right to send a participant home during the project, at the participant's expense. Such reasons include, but are not limited to, the use of alcohol or illegal drugs, disrespect toward site community and/or fellow project participants, or medical/psychological emergencies. To avoid misunderstandings, the group will define the parameters of conduct and activities, prior to departure. These parameters are for the common safety of the group.

BE AWARE. Every year, hundreds of young travelers are arrested domestically and in foreign countries for illegal possession, use, or trafficking of drugs. Some countries are strict and severe in their treatment of those arrested on drug-related charges. Participants are subject to domestic laws and the visiting-country laws. Your government and project leader are completely powerless should you be arrested domestically or internationally. Participants are asked to refrain from alcoholic beverages and the use of recreational drugs.

checklist

The following items are a general list of things to pack for your project. Participants can take one piece of checked luggage and one carry-on bag for day use.

What to Bring

- Baseball cap or hat with brim.
- Bug Net
- Cotton bandannas (bring 2 or 3 for drying hands, absorbing sweat, keeping sun off neck).
- Flashlight (optional)..
- Garbage Bags (to be used under twin size bedding to prevent bug bites and to store muddy clothing/boots).
- Health care products. (everyone must bring their own antibacterial ointment, bandaids and surgical gloves) SEE MEDICAL ISSUES FOR SUGGESTIONS.
- Insect repellent, sunscreen, sunglasses. A MUST – SEE MEDICAL ISSUES FOR SPECIFICS.
- Light rain jacket.
- Light long sleeve shirt and pants for hiking and if the mosquitoes are numerous.
- Light long sleeve shirt and lightweight pants for nighttime sleeping.
- Nightwear (may be mixed company at your host family home).
- Pants / jeans/ lightweight pants / shorts and/or sundresses just above the knee. SEE SITE BRIEFING FOR SPECIFICS.
- Project Packet, pens/pencils, journals, related articles for reading and sharing.
- Sandal or flip-flops for showering.
- Short sleeve t-shirts / shirts / blouses for work site. (X4) SEE SITE BRIEFING FOR SPECIFICS.
- Sleeping Sheet: flat sheet sewn on three sides.
- Small gifts for host family and pictures of your family. (SEE GIFTS FOR HOST FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS)
- Sneakers or shoes with rubber tread for project sites.
- Toiletries, and a roll toilet paper (unscented),
- Towels.
- Travel alarm clock (optional).
- Undergarments.
- Water bottle (large).
- Work clothing (appropriate for getting dirty or painted).
- Zip lock bags for packing items into and a few extra for the trip.

What Not to Bring

- DO NOT BRING OR WEAR any clothing or other items resembling military paraphernalia, including olive drab, camouflage, or any item having army-issue characteristics. Clothing advertising alcohol, tobacco, or other inappropriate products/wording should be left at home.
- DO NOT BRING any illegal drugs or alcohol, nor carry/pack firearms, explosives, knives, or anything that could be interpreted as potential weapons.
- DO NOT BRING expensive equipment or jewelry that you cannot afford to lose.

medical & insurance issues

This section is compiled from the most current reports we have received from the Center for Disease Control (CDC). Each traveler should review this information with his/her own doctor to determine which items pertain to their situation, especially if they are allergic to some medications, are concerned about side effects, possible pregnancy, or have unique health and/or dietary needs. *We have provided this information as a guide so that you may discuss questions with your physician. Total responsibility for medical needs falls on the participant. It is extremely important to contact your physician at least four to six weeks before your trip to allow immunization time to take effect.*

- **INSURANCE**, all service-learning participants traveling out of the domestic United States must be covered by a medical evacuation/repatriation/health insurance policy. (Please make a copy and give to project leader)

The National Center for Infectious Diseases through the Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommends travelers to Nicaragua take precaution against Hepatitis A by vaccine and against Malaria by the taking of anti-malarial medication. Immunizations should occur four to six weeks before traveling to Nicaragua.

TAKE TIME TO CHECK OUT THE CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL

WEBSITE. <http://www.cdc.gov/travel/camerica.htm#vaccines>

- **HEPATITIS A.** Hepatitis A is a transmitted viral disease that causes fever, nausea, and abdominal discomfort, followed within a few days by jaundice. The disease ranges in clinical severity from no symptoms or a mild illness lasting one/two weeks to a severely disabling disease lasting several months. Transmission can occur by direct person-to-person contact; through exposure to contaminated water, ice, or shellfish harvested from sewage-contaminated water; or from fruits, vegetables, or other foods that are eaten uncooked, and which can become contaminated during harvesting or subsequent handling. Hepatitis A is preventable by vaccine.
- **MALARIA.** Malaria is a disease transmitted to humans by the bite of an infected female mosquito. Symptoms may include fever and flu-like illness, including chills, headache, muscle aches, and fatigue, and may cause anemia and jaundice. Malaria can often be prevented by using anti-malarial drugs and by using protective measures to prevent mosquito bites (see below – *Preventing Insect Bites* – for preventative measures).
- **TETANUS**, an acute disease caused by *Clostridium tetani*, is characterized by muscle rigidity and painful spasms, often starting in the muscles of the jaw and neck. Severe tetanus can lead to respiratory failure and death. The disease is caused by a neurotoxin produced by anaerobic tetanus bacilli growing in contaminated wounds. Lesions that are considered "tetanus prone" are wounds contaminated with dirt, feces or saliva, deep wounds, burns, crush injuries or those with necrotic tissue. However, tetanus has also been associated with apparently clean superficial wounds, surgical procedures, insect bites, dental infections, chronic sores and infections, and intravenous drug use. In 5%-10% of reported cases in the United States, no antecedent wound was identified. Tetanus is a global health problem because *C. tetani* spores are ubiquitous. The disease occurs almost exclusively in persons who are inadequately immunized.
- **PREVENTING INSECT BITES.** To reduce mosquito bites, travelers should wear clothes that cover most of the body. Use an insect repellent on any exposed areas of the skin. The CDC recommends a repellent containing DEET (diethylmthyltoluamide) in 30-35% strength for adults. CDC also mentions the purchase of a bed net impregnated with the insecticide permethrin; these can be purchased in camping or military supply stores. Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants, especially from dusk to dawn. Keep your feet clean and dry, and do not go barefoot. Nightwear with elastic around the arms and legs is recommended. On occasion, fleas have bitten participants. Pharmacists recommend hydrocortizone cream for the relief of itching or rash associated with the bites.

- **DIARRHEA & DYSENTERY PREVENTION.** Diarrhea and intestinal problems are the most frequently reported illness of travelers to foreign countries where the food is different and water may not be treated. The project leader in Nicaragua will be on hand to answer specific questions about what is safe to eat and drink. Confine your fluid intake to bottled water, soft drinks, canned juices, or boiled water. Do not brush your teeth with and do not use ice cubes made of non-potable water. **STAY HYDRATED.** Carry a water bottle with you at all times. Don't drink juices mixed with tap water. Avoid produce that has been washed in tap water, unless you can peel off the outer layer. Water purifying tablets that contain iodine are useful. These may be purchased at most camping equipment stores in the U.S. For mild diarrhea, stick to a light diet with lots of clear liquids to replace lost fluid. There are many herbal teas, which are thought to aid in the treatment of diarrhea and dysentery, such as Raspberry, Comfrey, Peppermint, Ginger Root, Black, and Chamomile; you may wish to bring some along. Some believe that eating yogurt daily for one to two weeks prior to your trip is helpful. Yogurt capsules (the type that **DO NOT** need refrigeration) are available in health food stores and might be useful as a preventative measure. Pepto Bismol is an effective, common, and safe anti-diarrhea medication — bring tablets, not bottled. In addition, Imodium AD is a stronger, short-term remedy. Some physicians prescribe a low-dose, daily antibiotic to combat microbes in foreign waters. Ask your physician for recommendations.
- **PRESCRIPTION MEDICATIONS.** Contact your physician to be sure you have enough medication for your entire trip. Persons with medical problems which are not easily recognized (diabetes, allergic reactions to antibiotics or bee stings, heart conditions, epilepsy) should consider obtaining a medic alert identification tag. This tag is internationally recognized. Consult your physician on obtaining one.
- **OVER-THE-COUNTER MEDICATIONS.** Participants are responsible for taking their own over-the-counter medications, such as Tylenol, Advil, cough drops/medicine, diarrhea medicines, allergy medicines (can be very dusty and grassy), etc. Your Project Leader will have a basic first-aid kit available stocked with band-aids, bandages, iodine, anti-bacterial cream, plastic gloves, etc. The kit will not carry any over-the-counter medications, such as Tylenol. Project Leaders are not trained to dispense any type of medication. Therefore, participants must come prepared with their own over-the-counter medications.
- **OTHER HEALTH & SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS.** Volunteer work at sites typically requires light to moderate physical labor. Commonsense precautions that will make your work safe and problem free are as follows. Do not lift anything that you cannot easily manage. Use gloves when handling heavy or rough materials. Wear sturdy shoes, socks, and long pants that will withstand the work conditions. Work in well-ventilated areas when painting or when conditions are dusty. Treat minor cuts and abrasions immediately by rinsing with bottled water or hydrogen peroxide and applying a bandage with anti-bacterial ointment. Your Project Leader will have a basic first-aid kit. You should carry an individual kit to suit your own needs. Be sure to complete the Health Form (given separately) in detail so that your Project Leader is aware of any special medical needs you may have, such as diabetes, special dietary needs, allergy to bee stings, etc.
- **OTHER IMPORTANT NECESSITIES.** The sun is very strong in Nicaragua, and sunglasses are recommended; you might want to take multiple pairs of sunglasses. In addition, if you wear prescription glasses, bring an extra pair on the chance they get lost or broken. *Special Note for Contact Wearers:* it is very dusty from November to April, and you may have problems with your contacts. We suggest that you bring regular glasses with you in case you cannot wear your contacts. Also bring a sunblock with SPF 15 or higher.

beyond the project

Community service work and the exposure to other cultures and societies is rewarding and exciting. We encourage participants of Service-learning projects to share their impressions, concerns, and experiences with other members of the group throughout the project and to the general Boulder community upon their return. Spend time with your group members once you return to campus, to help each other sort through experiences and emotions. Opportunities for reflection increase one's understanding and awareness of experiences, offer connections to academic learning, provide the chance to learn more about what others encountered, and lead to ideas about future engagement in the issues and/or culture.

While on the project, you may become more concerned or passionate about a particular problem witnessed, such as hunger/nutrition of children, oppression of women, or plight of the homeless. We encourage you to take those concerns and reach out to AACC or within your community to help others and explore the causes/effects. Contact AACC for help in connecting with volunteer opportunities. Look for additional ways to share your experiences with others. Contact your local newspaper or TV station, make a scrapbook or web page, or present your experiences to a civic or school group. Be an advocate for Service-learning projects; urge someone else to consider this experience!

AACC will sponsor a **MANDATORY Welcome Back**, to be held within two a month of your return (date to be determined). The program allows all participants of Service-learning projects to present their experiences to the campus and reflect upon those experiences. Your group is required to share a presentation at the session. Come back prepared to show your friends and family the similarities and differences in the culture you experienced.

tear-out sheet for families

Emergencies

In case of an extreme emergency back home, your family members through delegates may contact you. Expect at least one day to make necessary arrangements for any emergency return to Boulder, plus travel time. An emergency return may incur additional costs to you, which are beyond our control.

Boulder Resident responsible for phone tree:

Project Leader: Deborah Young, dyoung@naropa.edu phone: 303-245-4681 and 303-527-2742 (phone not available while in country)

Telephone in Managua:

Telephone in Jalapa: 011 -505-737-2269 (Jalapa)