



ELAP Volunteer Expectations

Volunteering abroad through ELAP is very exciting, but it can be challenging at times since cross cultural miscommunications are inevitable in this environment. Volunteering in Latin America will probably seem different and even less organized than your previous volunteer experiences in the U.S. Personal initiative, patience with yourself and others, self-motivation and reliability are key characteristics of a successful volunteer, as well as flexibility, an open mind, ability to function under minimum supervision and the desire to participate and learn.

The program is designed to result in a greater sense of social responsibility and inspiration for continued involvement in a participant's home community upon his or her return. The program is also designed to encourage participants to learn about themselves, i.e. how to adapt in an unfamiliar environment, and thus experience personal growth throughout this intensely exciting experience.

This document is intended prepare you for potential circumstances – please remember that each ELAP experience is unique.

Personal initiative/Self-motivation. After you have become more familiar with your ELAP placement, talk with staff at the organization and with your ELAP Coordinator to try and identify useful projects or activities for you to take the initiative to start on. Focus on projects that require very few resources. Also be prepared to work towards a creative solution if something doesn't go as planned.

Patience with others. The pace of life will seem slower in Latin America and people will seem less task-oriented than what is customary in the U.S. Instead of trying to rush those around you, slow down and get to know the people and staff you are interacting with at the organization before initiating projects. Getting to know those around you can make your day more enjoyable and can possibly create new service-learning tasks for you.

Patience with yourself. When you arrive in-country or when you begin your volunteer activities, you may feel that you do not understand anybody and that you have no idea what you could do to help. Persevere! Keep going to the organization, keep asking how you can help and you will become more comfortable with your “new routine”.

Reliability. ELAP participants owe a commitment to the organization. If you are continually late or irresponsible in any way, this may affect whether or not the organization accepts other ELAP participants in the future.

Flexibility/Open-mindedness. The organizations receive volunteers in part because they need help accomplishing their daily activities and mission. Helpful volunteers do what is necessary, which can include occasionally participating in basic, repetitive, or perhaps, administrative tasks. In some organizations, particularly while interacting with children, volunteers may assist with the same daily activities with the children since routines instill a sense of security for them.

Comfortable with minimum supervision. Around the world, non-profit organizations and government agencies function with limited resources in terms of funding and/or staff. Your supervisor may not have time to meet with you daily and give you a list of activities to do.

Desire to participate and learn. Misunderstandings, due to culture and language, are inevitable in this environment. ELAP participants should try to learn quickly from these miscommunications, move on, and continue helping the organization with various activities.

Volunteering abroad through ELAP is very exciting, but it can be challenging at times. Despite these potential challenges, we believe that each participant who earnestly puts 100% effort towards the experience will reap countless benefits throughout the program. Former ELAP participants have observed that the process of volunteering is just as important as the results. They have also learned that the more you put into this unique experience, the more you will get out of it.

Through the process of volunteering and helping address the needs of a community/organization abroad, ELAP participants will improve life skills, such as problem solving, strong interpersonal communication, appreciation for community and diversity, the ability to cooperate and collaborate in an international setting, and a more intimate understanding of global issues. These skills are considered valuable to potential future employers.

Please keep all above mentioned points in mind, as you are volunteering in a foreign country.

I have read and understood the above information.

Signature

Date