

**Comunidad Connect  
Health and Safety Plan  
Dominican Republic**

*Updated: September, 2018*

**Background**

Comunidad Connect is a not-for-profit organization incorporated in the United States with the mission to connect social, economic, and environmental development opportunities in Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic with local and global resources. Funding for programs in community development, with a focus on healthcare, clean water, and youth development, comes in part from organized group trips to Nicaragua for educational, cultural exchange, or service work purposes.

This document presents information regarding health and safety during Cultural Connections trips that trip leaders, in particular, and all participants should be well aware of.

**Registering Travel**

It is recommended to register each participant with the U.S. Department of State's Smart Traveller Enrollment Program (STEP) to receive updates and advisories while in country. This program also registers participants with the U.S. Embassy in the Dominican Republic and will automatically notify their emergency contact in case of emergency.

**Summary of Risk Assessment**

Participants on a service-learning trip with Comunidad Connect assume risks of injury and illness while working on projects at the work sites, in rural homestays, and during tourism activities. The potential risks identified are of low harm and can be prevented by taking certain precautionary measures.

While working on community development projects, rural tourism, and during homestays, all participants are at risk of slipping and tripping on uneven, rocky, or slippery terrain. Participants should take precaution by wearing appropriate footwear (i.e. hiking boots, rain boots), while on uneven terrain. Participants should be aware of their surroundings and should listen to the local guide for instructions.

During projects, participants frequently handle construction tools and participate in manual labor. Comunidad Connect will provide protective gear where necessary and appropriate. Due to the environment, participants should be aware of their surroundings, as barbed wire is common in the Dominican Republic. Participants are recommended to use all protection gear given and to take extra precautions by wearing long sleeve shirts and pants while on the worksite to protect themselves from minor cuts, scrapes, blisters, and burns.

Participants, especially foreigners, are at risk of attaining traveler's illnesses, such as dehydration, traveler's diarrhea, sunburns, or fatigue. Comunidad Connect will provide access to purified water at all times, hygienically prepared food and drinks, and adequate sleeping and bathing areas to prevent

common illnesses. Staff will also provide access to a first aid kit, including sunscreen and insect repellent to protect participants from sunburns and mosquito borne illnesses.

While in urban areas, especially popular tourist areas, all participants should be aware of their belongings and take precautions not to become targets of petty theft. Foreign participants are more vulnerable to this risk than Dominican nationals. All participants should walk in groups of 2 or more, avoiding neighborhood deemed unsafe by Comunidad Connect staff.

If any participant in a Comunidad Connect service-learning trip or project ever feels at risk or sees a potential hazard, she/he should immediately report the concern to their guide in order to take precautionary measures.

## **Possible Hazards and Precautions**

### Personal Hazards

- Heat exhaustion can lead to confusion, dehydration, dizziness, fainting, fatigue, muscle cramps, headaches, nausea, vomiting and even stroke. To protect yourself:
  - Take time to acclimate to the climate and avoid long working days before acclimation
  - Stay well hydrated by drinking 8oz of water every 15-20 minutes
  - Watch for signs of heat exhaustion and immediately let your guide know if you are experiencing any of the listed symptoms
  - Take time to rest and cool down when necessary
- The sun in the Dominican Republic can be quite intense, leading to dehydration and sunburn. Rays are strongest at midday. Use a minimum of SPF 15 on all exposed areas 20 minutes before sun exposure and reapply every 2 hours or each time you get out of the water or perspire heavily. Do not forget to hydrate!
- Traveler's diarrhea affects 30-70% of travelers. Bacterial and viral traveller's diarrhea presents with the sudden onset of bothersome symptoms that can range from mild cramps and urgent' loose stools to severe abdominal pain, fever, vomiting, and bloody diarrhea, although with norovirus vomiting may be more prominent. If you are experiencing 2-5 loose stools per day please advise your guide you can begin medication if necessary.
- To avoid blisters, cuts and abrasions where the clothing indicated by your guide at all times
- Although it is very unlikely, should you sprain or break a bone while in the Dominican Republic, your guide will immediately follow the emergency protocol flowchart listed below.

### Animals and Insects

- Some mosquitoes in the Dominican Republic are known to transmit viruses including dengue, chikungunya, Zika, and malaria. Contagion can occur, though is rare.
  - Precaution: Reduce the chance of getting mosquito bites. This includes wearing long sleeves and pants, sleeping in air conditioned rooms or with mosquito nets, and wearing appropriate repellent with DEET or similar product. It is recommended that participants consult with their primary physician or travel clinic for all recommended medications, prescriptions and dosage patterns.

- For complete and up to date information, please visit the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website:  
<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/nicaragua>
- A number of hazardous reptiles and insects are found in the Dominican Republic, although largely in rural and forested areas. People who are prone to anaphylactic shock, should take extra precautions. Though there are various types of spiders and snakes, none are venomous and generally are not a threat to humans. Effort should be made to avoid contact with spiders, snakes, and other potentially harmful insects.
- Trip participants are recommended not to pet animals, even domestic pets. Most domestic animals (household dogs and cats) are not vaccinated or treated for fleas, ticks or worms. By petting these animals, participants risk getting bit by fleas, ticks, or even rabies. If a volunteer is bit by an animal, he/she should notify the Comunidad Connect guide immediately, and clean the wound with soap and water, bandage the wound, and apply an antibiotic ointment to prevent infection.

### Environmental

Always be aware of advisories and warnings. All restaurants and hotels will have marked evacuation routes. In the case of an emergency, participants should follow the evacuation routes and follow the Comunidad Connect guide's instructions.

- Earthquakes: The Dominican Republic lies on two major fault, causing earthquakes. In case of an earthquake, participants should take the following precautions and practice the "drop, cover and hold on" method: 1) drop to the ground on your hands and knees, 2) cover yourself with a sturdy desk or table, and 3) hold on to move with the tremors until the shaking stops. If a participant is indoors and cannot evacuate, he/she should not move until the shaking stops, drop down to his/her hands and knees to not be knocked over by the shaking, cover head and neck with arms to protect from falling debris. If a volunteer is outside during an earthquake, should move to an open area, free of buildings, street lamps, and utility wires, and "drop, cover, and hold on" until the shaking ends.
- Tsunamis- Tsunamis are very rare, but have occurred in coastal areas. In case of a tsunami, follow instructions from emergency officials and your Comunidad Connect guide. Relocate to high grounds or inland and away from the water immediately. Do not approach the beach.
- Hurricanes - Hurricanes are common in the Dominican Republic and hurricane season goes from early June through November. In case of a hurricane, Comunidad Connect staff will advise participants of any hurricane or tropical storm warnings. Participants and staff should evacuate the area when possible. If it is deemed unsafe to evacuate, participants and Comunidad Connect staff should stay where they are. Close all shutters and windows, as flying glass can cause injury. Turn on radio/TV every 30 minutes to get the latest weather updates and emergency instructions.
- Landslides- Rural areas at the base of steep hills are at higher risk of landslides following strong rains. During a severe storm, stay alert and awake, listening for unusual sounds that might indicate moving debris. Move away from the path of a landslide or debris flow as quickly as possible. Avoid river valleys and low-lying areas. Curl into a tight ball and protect your head if escape is not possible.

### Transit:

- Driving- Comunidad Connect uses vehicles with all proper documentation and insurances. Participants must use seat belts while the vehicle is in motion. On rural roads, the driver should not pass 25 mph, 30 mph in urban areas, 37 mph on freeways or 62 mph on open highways. Participants are not allowed to ride in truck beds in urban roads or open highway for safety reasons.
- Motorcycles- Under no circumstance is a participant allowed to drive or ride a motorcycle.
- Water transport- If taking a boat for recreation or for transportation, participants must use a personal floatation device (PFD) at all times. Participants should stay seated during the boat ride. If a participant is a poor swimmer or cannot swim, he/she should inform the guide before entering the boat.
- Walking- In rural communities and in urban areas, participants should always walk in groups of two or more. Participants should always be aware of their surroundings and limit their risk by not carrying large electronics, wearing expensive jewelry, or taking out large sums of money in public. Because of uneven terrain, even in urban areas, participants should be aware of their surroundings to prevent tripping and falls.
- Taxis and buses- Participants should avoid using public transportation and public taxis, unless accompanied by a Comunidad Connect guide or staff member.

### Urban:

- Dangerous neighborhoods- Participants should always follow the guide's advice when touring cities. Though Nicaragua is generally a very safe country, participants should not visit areas that appear unsafe and should always stay within the boundaries set by their guides. Participants should always walk in a group of at least two people and be accompanied by a Spanish-speaker, when available.
- Navigating- When available, participants should be given and carry a map of the city center to avoid becoming lost or entering dangerous neighborhoods. Participants should always travel in groups of 2 or more.
- Taxis- Participants are not permitted to take taxis, unless accompanied by a Comunidad Connect staff member, or arranged through Comunidad Connect. Participants should always travel in the designated truck or bus with the group and guides.
- Police- Participants should have a legible, color copy of the data page of their passport for any encounters with police. In Nicaragua, some police officers will ask for bribes, though Comunidad Connect does not recommend that participants offer or give bribes.
- Alcohol- Participants 21 years and older are allowed drinking alcoholic beverages in moderation during tourist activities. Consumption of alcohol is prohibited during volunteer or educational activities.

### Rural:

- Barbed wire fencing- While in rural communities, participants should be extremely careful of barbed wire. Barbed wire is frequently used as fencing and clotheslines. If participants cut themselves on barbed wire, they should immediately advise their guide, clean the wound with

hydrogen peroxide or antibiotic cream, remove any foreign elements from the wound with a sterile gauze, apply antiseptic cream to the wound, and bandage properly to prevent infection. Comunidad Connect guides carry first aid kits.

- Alcohol- Drinking alcoholic beverages is allowed for participants 21 years or older, though is not recommended during cultural exchange activities, and is prohibited for all participants during volunteer and educational activities.
- Livestock- As a part of cultural immersion and exchange, many participants participate in fieldwork and farm chores, such as milking cows. This is allowed, though always take precautions:
  - Never approach an animal that looks angry
  - When walking near livestock, give the animal sufficient space
  - Never threaten the animal unless you are in immediate danger
  - Always wash your hands after touching livestock
- Terrain- In rural communities and during some tourism activities, the designated walking path will not be paved. It is recommended that all participants be extremely careful when navigating these unpaved paths and roads to prevent injuries, such as sprained ankles. During rainy season, many of these paths become muddy and slippery, creating a higher risk of injury.

### **Areas and Cities to Avoid**

Comunidad Connect trips are planned in a way that avoids dangerous areas of Santo Domingo and other major urban centers. Students and participants should be sure to follow all guide instructions and never leave their hotel or volunteer site without obtaining permission from their guide.

### **Protocol for Vetting Employees and Local Contractors**

Comunidad Connect staff thoroughly interview personal, academic, and professional references for any potential new hire and conduct a thorough character evaluation. In some cases applicants may be requested to provide police records.

### **Title IX and Sexual Harassment Statement**

#### Sexual Harassment Policy

Comunidad Connect is pledged to preserving a working environment free from sexual harassment. Harassment is against the law and is a form of gender discrimination. The aim of this policy is to prevent harassment of any kind by anyone employed by, associated with, or contracted by the Comunidad Connect.

Sexual harassment consists of unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors or unwanted sexual attention by anyone associated with the company, whether male or female. Harassment may include references to employment status or conditions or may serve to create a hostile, intimidating or uncomfortable work environment. Harassment includes, but is not limited to, obscene jokes, lewd comments, sexual depictions, repeated requests for dates, touching, staring, or other sexual conduct committed either on or off company premises.

Victims of sexual harassment have the right to sue both the company and the perpetrator by contacting the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission or a state agency. For this reason and for the protection of all persons associated with Comunidad Connect, Comunidad Connect seeks to prevent sexual harassment.

All Comunidad Connect employees are responsible for helping ensure that our workplace is kept free of sexual harassment. If you feel you have been a victim of sexual harassment, report the behavior to your supervisor or the Executive Director. If you have witnessed sexual harassment, you also are urged to report the incident so that prompt action may be taken.

All complaints will be treated seriously, kept as confidential as possible and investigated fully. Comunidad Connect expressly forbids any retaliation against employees for reporting sexual harassment. If, however, the company finds that false charges have been filed, disciplinary action may be taken against anyone who provides false information.

If an investigation confirms that sexual harassment has occurred, immediate action will be taken to put an end to the harassment. Comunidad Connect will take appropriate corrective actions against anyone found to be in violation of this policy, including possible termination of employment.

#### Other Discriminatory Harassment

Comunidad Connect strongly supports the rights of all its employees to work in an environment free from all forms of harassment, including harassment on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, age or disability. Harassing conduct includes, but is not limited to:

- Epithets
- Negative stereotyping
- Slurs
- Threatening, intimidating or hostile acts that relate to the above characteristics
- Written or graphic material that denigrates or shows hostility or aversion toward an individual or group because of the above characteristics, and that is placed on walls, bulletin boards, or elsewhere on the premises, or circulated in the workplace.

In compliance with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Guidelines and our policy, Comunidad Connect prohibits harassment of any kind. If the result of an investigation indicates that corrective action is called for, such action may include disciplinary measures up to and including immediate termination of the employment of the offender.

#### **Expectations for Student Conduct**

While participating in a Comunidad Connect service-learning trip, students are expected to abide by all university, church, or organization's policies and the Dominican Republic and U.S. laws while in the Dominican Republic.

- The use of illegal drugs will not be tolerated.
- Participants 21 years and older can have alcoholic beverages, but should exercise moderation.

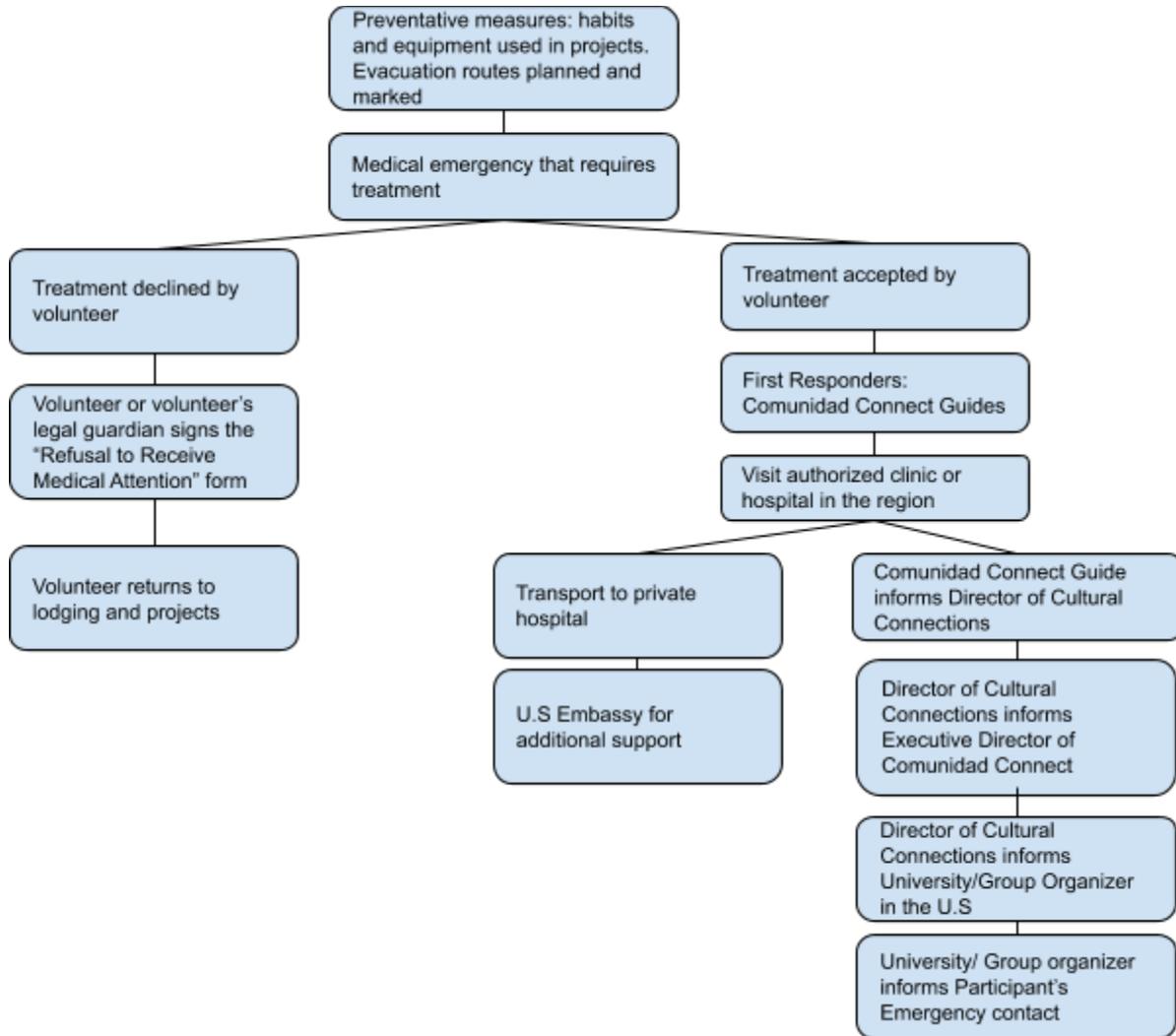
While participating in the service-learning trip, participants should consider the following habits to be respectful guests in the rural and urban communities of the Dominican Republic:

- In rural communities, Dominicans tend to go to bed early and rise early in the morning. It is important that we respect these routines.
- While participants are in the Dominican Republic, they are acting as ‘ambassadors.’ Participants are representing their organization or university and also the United States. Act appropriately.
- If at the end of the trip you feel you want to donate something that would not be of any use to you back home, please give it to a Comunidad Connect staff member and staff will make sure it is properly distributed to the people that need it most.

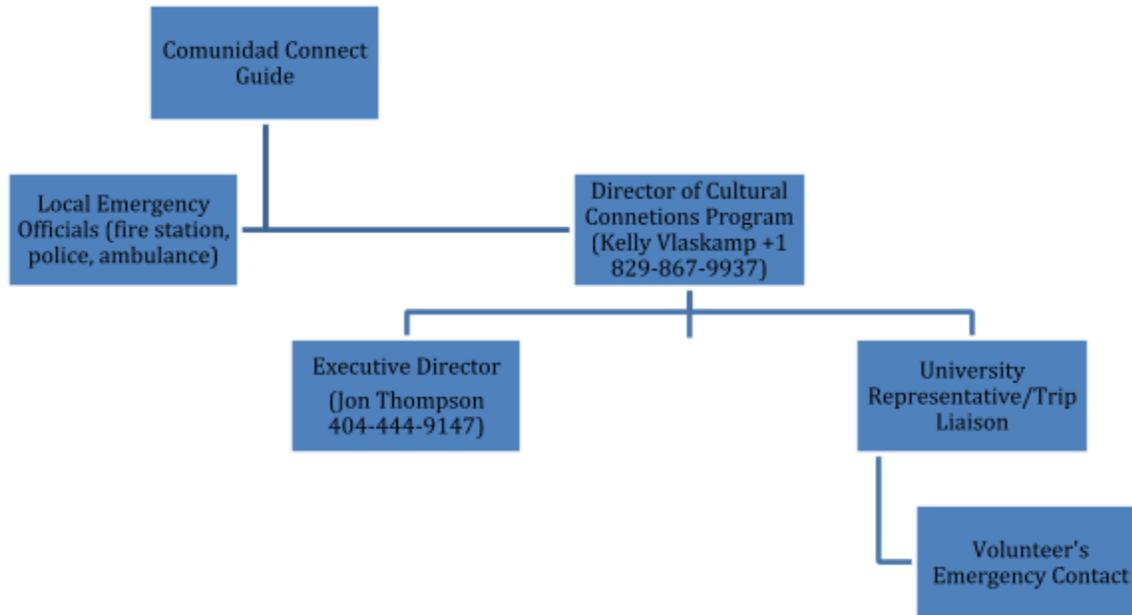
### **Emergency Plan and Communicational Protocol**

In the case of an emergency, the participants and Comunidad Connect guide should contact emergency officials (local fire station, police station, or Ministry of Public Health and Social Assistance for ambulance dispatch, depending on the emergency) and the in-country Program Coordinator. While the Comunidad Connect guide accompanies the volunteer to medical visit or during an evacuation, the in-country Program Coordinator will notify other Comunidad Connect staff and participants’ emergency contacts.

### **Emergency Flowchart**



## Emergency Phone Tree



### **Health Centers in the Dominican Republic**

A bilingual guide is guaranteed during all medical visits and exams. Participants can request a translator of his or her gender, if desired.

Santo Domingo: Plaza de la Salud General Hospital, Tel: +1 809-565-7477, Address: Av Ortega y Gasset

Puerto Plata: Brugal Clinic Mejia López, Tel; 1 809-586-2519

, Address: Calle José del Carmen Ariza

Sosua: Cabarete Medical Center (Centro Medico Cabarete), Tel: + 1 809-571-4696 Address: Highway 5, Sosua.

Santiago: Tel: +1 829-947-2222 Address: Autopista Duarte 28

### **EMERGENCY CONTACT INFORMATION:**

Emergency Contacts in the USA:

Jon Thompson, Exec. Director- 404-444-9147; [jon@comunidadconnect.org](mailto:jon@comunidadconnect.org)

### **US Embassy in the Dominican Republic:**

Address: Av. República de Colombia 57, Santo Domingo 10505, Dominican Republic

Telephone: [+1 809-567-7775](tel:+18095677775)

Hours: 7:00 AM to 4:30 PM

### **US Consular Agency**

**Address:** Villanueva Street at the corner of Juan Bosch (formerly John F. Kennedy Ave.). Abraxa Bookstore Bldg., 2nd. Floor, Puerto Plata

**Phone Number:** (809) 586-8017, (809) 586-4204, (809) 586-8023; Fax (809) 586-8015. Phone calls are only answered between the hours of 2:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m., Mon-Fri.

**Email:** [PuertoPlataConsularAgency@state.gov](mailto:PuertoPlataConsularAgency@state.gov)

### Sources:

*Ready.gov*

*US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission*