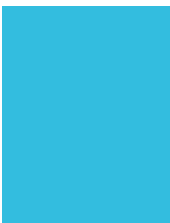




**Nicaragua**

**Internship Program**



# Program Overview

The Comunidad Connect Internship Program is a three-week immersive experience connecting students with community-based development initiatives in Nicaragua. Through pre-departure preparation, on-site orientation, and individualized placements with local partners, students gain hands-on experience while learning principles of asset-based community development and social determinants of health.

Students also engage with Nicaraguan culture through community visits and regional experiences in Jinotega or San Juan del Sur. The program concludes with a cohort-designed service project developed with guidance from Comunidad Connect staff and local partners.

## Our Locations



**Dominican Republic**



**Nicaragua**



**United States**



# Who We Are

Comunidad Connect brings together volunteers, donors, friends, students, neighbors and community leaders to address the social determinants of health and improve the quality of life of families living in poverty. We believe everyone has the right to make a difference.

## Our Guiding Principles



### Asset-Based Approach

We start with community strengths and assets, building on existing resources and capabilities rather than focusing solely on deficits.



### Relationship-Centered

Authentic, long-term relationships are the foundation of all our work, creating trust and enabling sustainable collaboration.



### Community Leadership

Local communities lead their own development process; our role is to support, amplify, and help resource their vision.



### Co-Investment Model

All stakeholders have something to contribute - time, skills, or funding - which opens space for co-creation of projects and shared ownership.

# Our Team



### Jon R. Thompson

**Co-Founder & CEO, Comunidad Connect**

Jon co-founded Comunidad Connect in 2007 on a simple conviction: lasting change requires genuine partnership, not charity. What began as grassroots community development in Nicaragua has grown into a multi-country network impacting tens of thousands of lives through healthcare, housing, clean water, and education. The Atlanta Journal-Constitution named him a "Hometown Hero," though he describes himself simply as a bridge-builder.

In 2009, Jon launched Cultural Connections to prove that mission and financial sustainability aren't mutually exclusive. Now in its 16th year, the program has engaged over 2,000 volunteers, partnered with dozens of private and public universities and generated over \$5 million to fund community programming across three countries. That proven infrastructure is what makes Comunidad Connect uniquely positioned to host transformative, well-supported internship experiences in the Dominican Republic.



### Alejandro José Noguera Castro

**Youth Connections Program Coordinator, Comunidad Connect Nicaragua**

Alejandro José Noguera Castro is the Youth Connections Program Coordinator for Comunidad Connect in Nicaragua. Born and raised in San Juan del Sur, he excelled in baseball from a young age, eventually reaching the professional level and pitching for the Nicaraguan national team. Following a career-ending injury in 2006, he joined Comunidad Connect to lead its youth development and athletic programming.

Youth Connections has since grown into Comunidad Connect's longest-running program, serving youth across San Juan del Sur and surrounding communities. Today, Alejandro runs numerous youth sports leagues, including the Inter Campus soccer program in partnership with Inter Milan and directs the local youth baseball academy. He has impacted the lives of thousands of young people over more than fifteen years of community service.



### Yarisleidy Cortez

**International Programs Strategist, Comunidad Connect**

Yarisleidy is an expert in social program design, community engagement, and sustainable development across Central America and the Caribbean. Her career grew directly out of fieldwork with Comunidad Connect in Nicaragua, where she developed the cross-cultural fluency and community trust that make effective internships possible.

Yarisleidy drives Comunidad Connect's program strategy and leads a team of dedicated staff and community partners - helping ensure that interns are not just placed in communities, but are prepared, guided, and integrated in ways that benefit all stakeholders. Her people-centered approach and regional expertise are key assets in facilitating internship experiences that are rigorous, ethical, and genuinely transformative.



### Maria de los Angeles Perez Peralta

**Finance and Human Resources Manager, Comunidad Connect**

María de los Ángeles began her journey in social work at 19 during an internship with an organization focused on health, nutrition, and food security. Through this experience, she discovered her passion for community service and her commitment to ensuring social initiatives endure through transparent management, strong processes, and responsible stewardship of resources.

Her mission is to safeguard the trust of communities and donors by ensuring every action creates meaningful impact through ethical and transparent financial management. María believes in practicing finance with humanity, using her knowledge to serve others, strengthen organizations, and transform lives.

She is inspired by empowered communities working for the common good and finds motivation in seeing families improve their quality of life through well-executed projects. For María, when finance is guided by purpose, it goes beyond numbers — becoming hope, transformation, and well-being for the communities served.



# Our Impact

Since 2007, we've been creating measurable change in communities across Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic.

**4,000+**

community members with improved healthcare access

**150+**

families with improved housing

**500+**

youth engaged in development programs

**2,000+**

volunteers and service learning participants



# Where We Work

## Nicaragua

Our work here focuses on building strong partnerships with local organizations and adapting our health, housing, and youth programs to meet the specific needs of Central American communities.



# Phases of Learning

## Pre-learning

Before traveling to Nicaragua, students attend two virtual orientation sessions introducing the country's history, culture, and key issues in community development and global health in Central America. Sessions cover asset-based community development, social determinants of health, and working across language and cultural differences. Students also learn about rural and urban life, including coffee production, small-scale entrepreneurship, education access, and community health challenges, while connecting with program staff to prepare for their field experience.

## Orientation & Work Phase

During the first week, program staff orient students to their host communities through guided visits, partner introductions, and cultural activities. Students are placed with organizations aligned with their field of study, such as public health, education, social work, nursing, communications, business, or environmental sustainability. Weekly reflection meetings allow students to share experiences, discuss challenges, and begin developing ideas for a community-centered service project.



## Cultural Immersion

Throughout the program, students engage with Nicaraguan culture through daily community interaction, local visits, and cultural activities. Participants may live with host families (with daily meals) or in shared apartments.

Activities include guided visits with community leaders, participation in everyday life, and experiences with traditional cuisine, music, art, and local customs. Depending on location, students may also explore coffee culture in Jinotega or coastal traditions in San Juan del Sur.



# Program Itinerary

## Pre-Trip Virtual Preparation

Students attend two virtual meetings with program staff.

**Session 1:** Introduction to Nicaraguan history, culture, and the program's mission in health, education, housing, sport, and community development.

**Session 2:** Overview of field placement partners and program itinerary, with time for students to ask questions and prepare for

## Week 1 Orientation Week

### Day 1 — Arrival

Students are welcomed at Augusto Cesar Sandino International Airport and transported to their accommodations.

### Days 2–3 — Orientation & Community Introduction

Students meet the program team and explore their host region. Jinotega offers a rural coffee-growing setting, while San Juan del Sur provides a coastal environment focused on tourism and marine life.

### Day 4 — Placement Site Visits

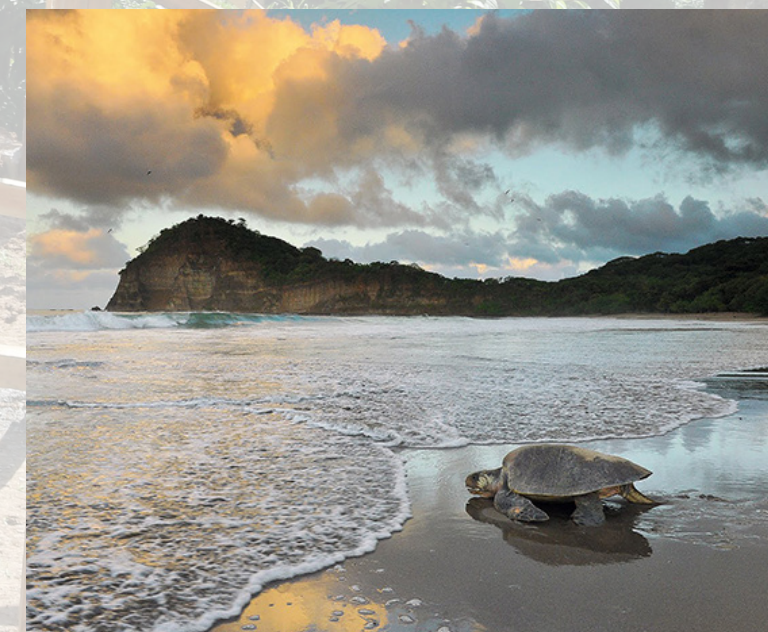
Students visit partner organizations, meet supervisors, and learn about community needs.

### Day 5 — First Day at Placement

Students begin with a half-day at their placement followed by a group reflection meeting.

### Weekend — Cultural Immersion

Activities may include a coffee farm visit (Jinotega) or coastal excursion (San Juan del Sur), along with local cultural experiences.



# Program Itinerary

## Week 2

### Full Internship Immersion

#### **Monday–Friday — Placement Work**

Students spend full days at their placement sites, with free time for language practice, journaling, or exploration. Midweek, they visit a different Comunidad Connect project to learn how partners address social determinants of health.

#### **Service Project Brainstorming**

During the Friday meeting, students begin planning their Week 3 service project by discussing community needs and ideas with guidance from staff and partners.

#### **Weekend — Cultural Immersion II**

Activities may include local markets, music, nature excursions, or community events.



## Week 3

### Service Project & Reflection

#### **Monday–Wednesday — Placement & Project Work**

Students continue their placements while using afternoons to implement their group service project with support from CC staff and a small project fund.

#### **Thursday — Project Presentation**

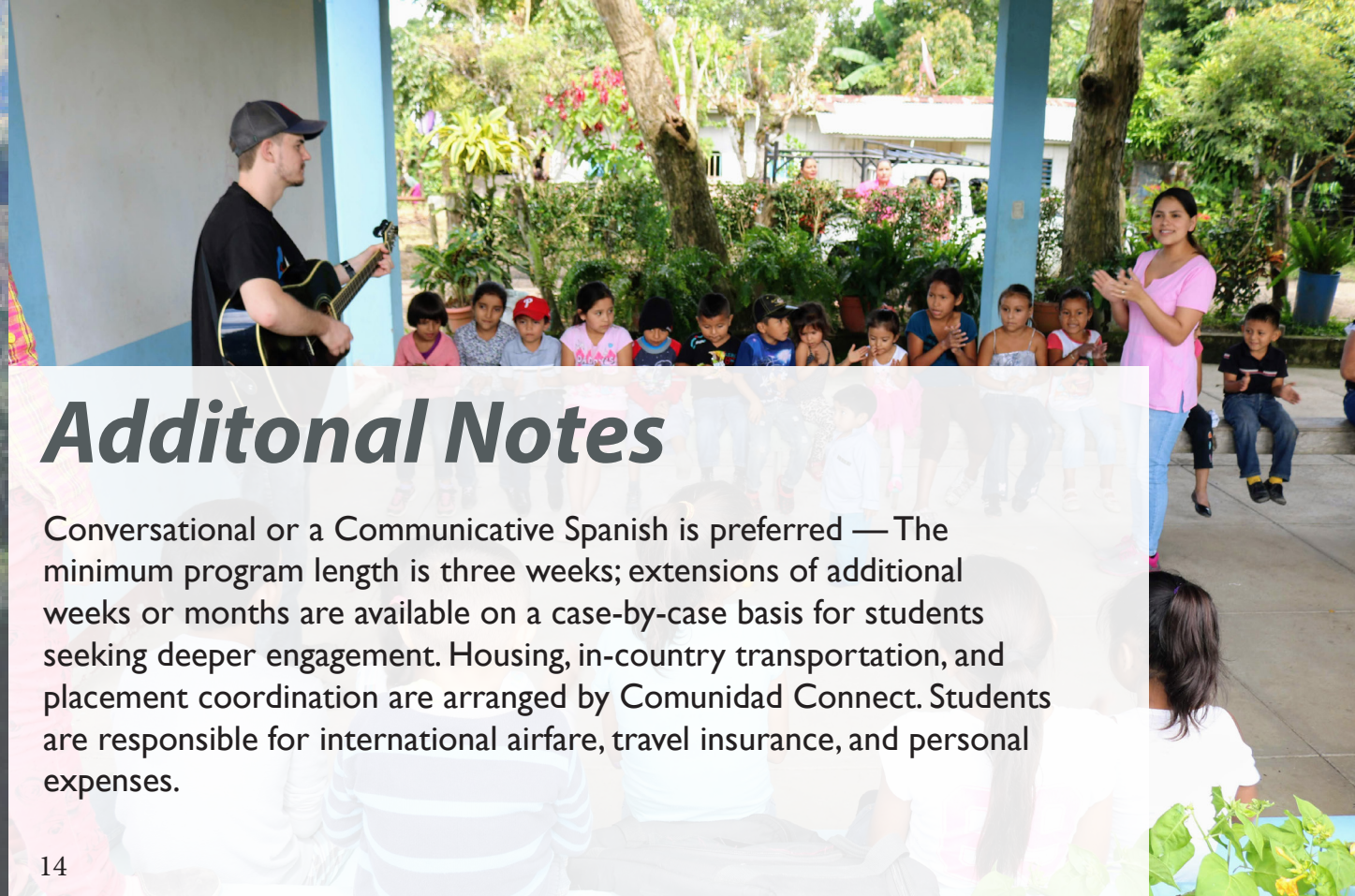
Students present their project to CC staff, partners, and community members.

#### **Friday — Final Reflection & Closing**

A final group session to reflect on the experience and lessons learned, followed by certificates and a farewell dinner.

#### **Weekend — Departure**

Optional excursion for those staying through the weekend; departures coordinated by CC staff.



## ***Additional Notes***

Conversational or a Communicative Spanish is preferred — The minimum program length is three weeks; extensions of additional weeks or months are available on a case-by-case basis for students seeking deeper engagement. Housing, in-country transportation, and placement coordination are arranged by Comunidad Connect. Students are responsible for international airfare, travel insurance, and personal expenses.



*Are You Ready?*

# Your global experience starts here.

*Schedule your info session today!*

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