

Dominican Republic Mission Leader Resources





Table of Contents

Pre-Trip Team Meetings	03
Fundraising	06
Background Checks	08
Insurance	09
Flights and Travel Requirements	11
On the Ground in DR	16

Mustard Seed Communities | 29 Janes Avenue | Medfield MA 02052 | 508.242.9622

www.mustardseed.com

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Pre-Trip Team Meetings

Informational Team Meetings

Clearly state trip date and country, expectations of mission volunteers, and costs of trip

Give them an idea of what the trip will be like. While at MSC, you will spend time playing with and caring for the residents. You'll also complete various work projects involving painting, landscaping and light construction. All of this takes place in the community along with MSC staff and residents. Utilize the information on [our website](#) to explain the mission of MSC and tell people about the residents with whom you will spend time.

You may ask the returning members from your school or parish to share a little of their experiences with Mustard Seed.

You may also want to check out our [Youtube](#) or [Vimeo](#) channels for videos of the residents and staff to give potential mission volunteers more insight into our work.

Here is a great [quick video overview](#) of Mustard Seed

Interested volunteers should register to join your team online through [TeamRaiser](#).

First Official Team Meeting

Make sure everyone on the team is registered for your team on [TeamRaiser](#).

Encourage volunteers to start setting up their own personal page to tell their story- this would be good to go over in the first meeting and set a deadline to complete for the second meeting.

Explain the [Pre-Trip Planning Groups](#), have volunteers select a group and get them started on tasks.

Pre-Trip Meeting Format/Suggestions

We suggest that you meet at least once a month, preferably twice a month with your group for at least three months leading up to the trip. Most groups start meeting around 6 months out from the trip.

Below is a suggested format for your meetings:

Opening Prayer/Reflection (Spirituality Group)

Start off with a prayer or reflection at the beginning of each meeting to center your group and give them time to think about the reasons they said yes to coming on this trip.

Whole Group Check In/IceBreaker (Community Building Group)

It is important to set aside time to check in with each group member, whether it is a life update, fundraising question, or a concern. Make time to check in and do a different icebreaker each meeting.

Leader Update

Gives you time to update the team on any important logistics or upcoming deadlines for forms, paperwork, or fundraising goals the team may have. It may be helpful to assign a task for the team at the end of each meeting, so this may be a good time to ensure everyone has done what is required.

Activity

The leader plans an activity for the group to help prepare them for the trip (See suggestions below).

Pre-trip Planning Group Time

Give each group time in the meeting to check in with each other. They can use this time to plan, set a time for their group to meet, update each other on anything that needs to be done, etc.

Pre-trip Planning Group Sharing

Give groups time to share any updates they have or get help/ideas from the team if they need it.

Closing

The leader can close out the meeting with a prayer/inspirational message or video from MSC for the team.

Here are some topics to cover as the leader or to assign for team members to lead:

- History of MSC/ Life at Mustard Seed Example
 - Here is a good comprehensive [document](#)
 - [Mission Trip Video DR](#)
- Introduction to the Dominican Republic (Cultural Exchange Team)
 - Dominican culture, language and customs
- Pushing yourself outside your comfort zone
 - Living in another country, food, housing
 - Embracing cross-cultural differences
- Working with children and adults with disabilities
 - Our [website](#) has a lot of useful information on this!
 - Here is a video from our Youtube channel: [Interacting with the Residents](#)
- Short term mission trips
 - What is the purpose of this trip?
 - How should we prepare ourselves?
 - What do we bring with us from this experience?
- MSC Q and A Meeting with Team- MSC USA and MSC DR staff
 - We would love to meet with your team before traveling to DR to give mission volunteers a chance to ask questions and hear from MSC DR staff before they leave.

Fundraising

Basics

Minimum donation to MSC is \$950 per person excluding airfare. We encourage you to set your fundraising goal high and raise more than the required minimum donation. Over 50% of your minimum donation goes directly to caring for the residents.

Some groups choose to fundraise together for airline ticket costs and some groups request the mission volunteer pay for their own flight. As the trip leader, this is your call. For transportation purposes, all mission groups must travel on the same flight.

Once volunteers are committed, they will register to join your team online. The online registration process requires a \$15 deposit which is applied to their minimum fundraising goal of \$950. If the mission volunteer cannot participate for some reason, donations will be added to the group funds. MSC donations are non-refundable.

TeamRaiser

Upon confirmation of your trip dates, you will receive a link to register your team with TeamRaiser. **A registration fee of \$500 is due upon registration. The fee can be paid online or by check.**

The registration fee and contributions are non-refundable. Contributions may be transferable to an available future mission trip date.

50% of the projected mission fee is due no later than 120 days prior to the trip start date. This projected number will be based on the estimated number of trip participants or a minimum of 12 persons. The remaining balance is due no later than 60 days prior to the trip start date. If you are having trouble meeting this deadline, please reach out to us, so we can work with you.

TeamRaiser will be your base for fundraising. Once you register your team, invite your mission volunteers to register and begin creating their own personal fundraising pages.

From TeamRaiser, you are able to send emails to supporters, share your story and fundraising page on social media, and keep track of your team fundraising and progress in meeting your goals.

Getting Started and Finding Supporters

Brainstorm your potential supporters – parish members, friends, family, sports teams, etc. Create an email list to promote your fundraising pages and events! Encourage the team to set up their personal pages as soon as possible!

Utilize the internet and social media to spread the word about the trip. Get to know more about Mustard Seed Communities through [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#). Our [FAQ page](#) also has helpful information for first-time mission volunteers.

You can also encourage mission volunteers to look at our [Peer-to-Peer fundraising tips](#) for ideas.

Check in with each of your participants individually to see how they are progressing. They will look to you for encouragement and support if they are struggling. Remind your team that they've already done the most difficult part- saying yes to going on the mission trip!

Background Checks

Process

Once a team has registered for a mission trip, the Associate Director of Volunteer Engagement will order a background check for you as the leader of the group. You will receive an email from Sterling Volunteers with a link to complete the background check. The mission volunteers will receive an automated email, asking them to fill out a background check. This [link](#), located within the email, will send volunteers to Sterling Volunteers' website where they can sign up and apply for a background check and pay the fee.

Mustard Seed has partnered with Sterling Volunteers to ensure the safety of our residents who are entrusted to our care. Background checks are conducted annually and the \$17.50 fee is not part of the \$950 fundraising commitment. Due to record-keeping fees, certain states (CO, DE, FL, HI, IA, ME, MT, NE, NY, SD, UT, VT and WI) and certain counties in the U.S. may be subject to additional fees. Please check [the list](#) to see if these fees apply to your county. If you need assistance in navigating the process of completing your background check, you may contact Sterling Volunteers at 855-326-1860. You may also email them at TheAdvocates@sterlingvolunteers.com.

Tracking

The Associate Director of Vol. Engagement will work with the Team Leader to ensure each member of the team completes this check. When a background check is completed, the team leader can complete the "Background check tracker" located in the "Team Leader Resources" folder of your team's shared mission folder. If not, they will send a follow up email to each volunteer through Sterling Volunteers by importing each Volunteer's name and email address, asking them to complete the "Advanced Criminal Locator Search with Locator Select" background check. It will be up to the team leader to ensure each member of their team completes this prior to their trip, if they are 18 and over.

If a member of the team has any disqualifying criteria, MSC will enact their policy for reviewing such information.

Insurance

General Insurance Information

AXA Assistance is available 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. They may be reached toll-free at 1-855-327-1414 in US. From overseas, call direct or collect to +630-694-9764. Spanish Speaking representatives are available. Have **MSC Policy Number GLMN18139194**, ACE American Insurance Company on hand should you have an emergency. You should carry or have copies of these documents on hand. They will also be found under Team Leader Resources in your shared team folder.

- [AXA Client Summary](#)
- [AXA Client ID Card and Recommendations](#)
- [ACE Travel Assistance Marketing Sheet](#)
- ["How do I file a claim ACI with AXA"](#)

Coverage, Payments, and Quarantine

Insurance coverage begins at the moment of disembarkation from the home country.

Coverage ends when the individual arrives in home country. This assumes that the entire trip is for your volunteer activities and there is no personal deviation (example, vacation time continuation) associated with the trip. Personal deviation is not covered under this plan. Should you need to utilize the insurance while traveling you should present the ACE insurance information to the hospital admitting clerk. Do not present personal insurance information. Note that in all our countries we have experienced medical personnel who have refused to accept insurance. In this case, you should pay out of pocket (hence our recommendation to carry a credit card). When paying out of pocket you must get discharge paperwork/receipts

for payment. Upon return to the US, the payor should submit a claim for reimbursement with the insurance provider.

If payment represents a hardship, you should invoke the insurance.

- Advise hospital billing rep to contact the emergency service number for ACE at 1-855-327-1414. They have Spanish speaking agents available if needed.
- A claim will be started and the billing clerk at the hospital should work with the Insurance provider to fax/email a guarantee of payment letter. Be certain you make a note of the claim number, and names and telephone numbers for all parties you speak with.
- Upon discharge, be certain to obtain discharge papers and copies of all bills and paperwork that would be relevant to patient care. These will be needed by the insurance company to process the claim.

Insurance will pay expenses incurred for up to \$2,000 for all covered expenses if you are subject to a quarantine for any contagious disease that prevents traveling, such as COVID-19. Symptoms of the disease must first appear after the start of the trip and the quarantine must cause an interruption or delay in your trip for which suitable accommodations are not otherwise available. Benefits will end on the earlier of 14 days after the quarantine is issued or the date the quarantine expires. More detailed information about all the insurance policy covers can be found in the documents above.

Flights and Travel Requirements

Booking tips and Flight Guidelines

- Sign up for trip alerts that can send you emails when ticket prices fall (tripadvisor.com, kayak.com, Google flights, Hopper).
- Call airlines directly and inquire about group sales and payment options.
- Look for the least expensive flights for a Saturday to Saturday trip- Be sure to follow [Mustard Seed Flight Guidelines](#). Let us know if you have any questions.
- Book tickets online or use a non-profit travel agency – just remember that you may have as many as 20 mission volunteers so every dollar counts! An agent can reserve dates for you without requiring payment up front. **Keep in mind, all mission team volunteers must arrive and depart together.**
- Please [submit your flight itinerary](#) approximately 120 days prior to departure.

Passports

Every team member will need a valid passport. The passport should be valid for six months after you return from your mission trip. It may take a few months (8-11 weeks), so [apply for a new passport](#) immediately if you need one.

Traveler's Health and Immunizations

Specific immunizations depend on the country where you're serving. Visit the [CDC website](#) for the most up-to-date information on traveler's health. Talk to your family physician to seek advice about immunizations – why they are needed, where to go for them, prescriptions needed, any and other medical

issues related to your travel. Some immunizations may require a series of vaccines over the course of a few months so please be sure to research this early in your trip preparation.

COVID-19: Mustard Seed Communities has implemented a mandatory COVID-19 vaccination policy for mission volunteers in order to protect the residents of Mustard Seed Communities, the majority of whom are immunocompromised.

- **All mission volunteers are required to provide evidence of a COVID-19 vaccine series and a booster shot at the recommended timing according to the CDC guidelines prior to travel. All mission volunteers must travel with a copy of their vaccination card.**
- The policy has been established in consideration of guidance released by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and a variety of public health authorities. Information on our COVID-19 Protocols can be found [here](#).
- All team leaders are asked to upload each individual's COVID-19 vaccination card at least two months prior to the trip, although we suggest this happens upon registration.

Packing for the Trip

Packing List

For a detailed list of what to bring, see the [packing list](#). We recommend that volunteers pack lightly. You may be surprised to see what you are able to live without! If each mission volunteer packs their personal items in a carry-on bag, then checked bags can be used for donations. Some airlines charge a fee for the second checked bag.

Since there are fees for checked bags, we recommend scrutinizing the donations you accept. Ask yourself, "Does the value of the donations packed in this luggage exceed the cost we will be paying to bring it to MSC?" Check Baggage Requirements for your airline, specifically dimensions, weight and cost for checked and carry-on bags for international flights.

Some mission groups gather together before their trip for a packing party. This gathering is sometimes the last time everyone sees each other before meeting at the airport. Make this a celebration of all your hard work in preparing for this mission trip! Share a meal, spend time in prayer, and pack all of the generously donated items together!

Make labels for your luggage tags ahead of time so that your group won't have to fill them out at the airport. Bring these to the airport. Also, mark the

mission trip bags by tying brightly colored string to the handles so that they are easy to retrieve.

Confirm with your airlines any requirements for excess baggage fees, sizes, weights, labeling, etc.

In-Kind Donations

You should begin your collection of the various items and supplies that you will be bringing to Mustard Seed about 3 months before your trip. If you are planning a clothing, diaper, toiletries or school supplies drive, please make sure you begin advertising early and begin careful organization of the event itself. Here is a [list of item suggestions](#).

We ask that you speak to the Missions Program Manager and Associate Director of Volunteer Engagement before collecting items to see what the greatest need is at the time of your trip.

With the MSC DR staff, make sure that you have established a designated place for collection and storage of these items

Donated items will be checked as your luggage. The donated items should be packed in duffle bags or suitcases separate from personal items. **Do not pack your donations in bins.** Take the donated items out of their package to free up much needed luggage space for additional items. Again, encourage mission volunteers to try and pack personal items in a carry-on luggage and assign two donation bags as their check-in luggage.

Each bag or luggage should be packed and have a list describing the contents. When the bags are assigned to a mission volunteer, he/she should receive the index card listing all the contents. When the mission volunteer checks in at the airport, he/she will be checking their own luggage and will need to know what is in the bag and be able answer questions regarding its contents. The mission volunteer should hold this card until they have cleared customs at their destination. **The group leader should have a master list of all checked bags and their contents. Having a list of all items will save time in customs if you are asked questions about what is in your luggage and is helpful to the MSC staff to understand what may still be needed.**

The [Value in Kind list](#) of all donated items needs to be turned into the Associate Director of Volunteer Engagement at least two weeks prior to departure. We realize this process can be tedious, but as an organization, we need to have a record of these valuable donations.

Before Arriving at the Airport

- Register the team with the State department's [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program](#) at least three weeks prior to departure
- If traveling with minors under the age of 18, ensure you have all [Letters of Consent for Minor Travel](#) forms. Each minor must have a consent form from **BOTH** parents.
- The Dominican Republic adopted an electronic system providing digital versions of the Traveler's Health Affidavit, Customs Declaration and International Embarkation/Disembarkation forms, combined in a single digital form. All passengers entering and departing the country on commercial flights will be required to fill out and submit their digital forms through the [Electronic Ticket Portal](#) either before or upon their arrival to the country. To save time during the arrival procedure, we recommend filling out the form 72 hours before the trip, printing or making a screenshot of the QR code and keeping it on hand until arrival, where it will be scanned by the authorities when the passenger goes through Customs. Passengers will need to fill out a form for arrival and another one for departure and the system will generate two QR codes
- A negative PCR and Antigen Covid-19 test result must be had within seventy-two (72) hours of the travel date to DR.
- A negative Antigen Covid-19 test is required for departure from DR to the United States (within one day). MSC will provide on site testing to volunteers. Please note that COVID testing in DR is around \$45 per person.
- It is suggested that any team member carrying a personal cell phone should update their I.C.E. (In Case of Emergency) contact prior to travel.
- As the team leader, you are advised to carry a copy of your teams' passports, insurance information, leader report provided by MSC USA Mission staff, and a credit card with approximately \$500 available credit.

At the Airport and Getting Through Customs

- Meet group at airline ticket counter **3 hours** before the flight
- All mission volunteers are responsible for their own luggage. Make sure that you find your particular luggage and transport it to the designated custom line. Only provide the list of items in your luggage if asked. If the mission volunteer is informed as to what is in his/her luggage and lets the custom agent know, it will help with the credibility of the group. Now you are ready to go through your final line to leave the building. If there are luggage handlers outside, they may have a designated system for you to

follow to get your luggage to your bus.

- Don't worry if donations are confiscated from customs. MSC DR staff will return to the airport and declare the items the next day.

Lost Luggage

If the airline loses any luggage of your team members, do not worry. The MSC DR staff will help you through the process and can make arrangements to pick up your luggage when it is found.

On the Ground in Dominican Republic

Orientation in DR

Once outside, you will be greeted by MSC staff who will lead you to the bus. Once your whole group is ready, you will be off to start your trip. Please feel free to ask them questions right away and throughout your trip. They will give your group an orientation once you have arrived at the home.

During Orientation, MSC staff will go over all the rules and expectations for your group regarding food, cleaning, cultural differences, interactions with the residents, safety - including updated COVID-19 protocols, and the week's schedule.

As a group leader, you are asked to:

- Establish sleeping arrangements and expectations for your group.
- Collect passports and money to be locked up in the safe
- Ensure your group knows who to contact in an emergency and has the name and number of the Apostolate Director.
- Assign jobs for your group and make sure every member of the team has a role
- Unpack group supplies and donations and let MSC staff know what to take.

Team Leader Roles and Responsibilities

- First and foremost, the leader is responsible for the team at all times in everything they do- there are no "days off"
- Always do a head count each time the bus departs any location- keep a team list with you!
- Inform team ahead of time of cultural differences that may come up

during the trip. Ensures that team members are respectful of cultural differences and treat all with courtesy and respect

- At MSC's recommendation, the leader does not distribute schedules to the team unless they feel it is absolutely necessary (e.g. a therapy team with a detailed program). Ensures that the team is informed of (or not) what the expectations are for the day by reviewing schedule or conversely, encouraging participation over anticipation. Certain aspects of the schedule are not flexible or able to be changed.
- Ensures that the mission house is kept in neat and clean order, all trash removed nightly, no food left out, and any housekeeping issues are addressed.
- Ensures team members do not travel with valuables, and uses safe to ensure security of documents, etc.
- Works in cooperation with mission staff to ensure team is on task and engaged
- Leader is responsible for the team being up on time and/or delegating this task to members of the group
- Leader is responsible for putting team into groups if work project requires multiple groups working on different parts
- Does not assume mission staff are "now in charge" of the group, they are the leader and should be maintaining order and cooperation amongst team members.
- Makes it clear before the trip that MSC is faith-based and that the group will be invited to participate in prayer and worship. Informs the team that participation in faith activities, while optional, are encouraged and open to all. Ensures that the group is sensitive and welcoming to team members of all faith backgrounds.

Individual Mission Teams Jobs

The team should share responsibilities over the course of the trip.

- You may choose to change the jobs daily or have volunteers keep the same job throughout the trip
- Make sure your team members are clear in what they need to do and are supportive of each other
- Job conversations should ideally be talked about on the first night of the trip

Here are some possible jobs team members may have:

- **Videographer** – takes video throughout trip, works with MSC Staff to capture team moments
- **Photographer** – Have one person take those great group shots, remind team members to upload their pictures to the google folder at the end of the trip
- **Reflection Leaders** – Assign a team member each night to lead the group in reflection/prayer
- **Wake Up Crew** – wakes up the group each morning
- **Lights Out Crew**- lights out at 11pm in the dorm rooms
- **Music Group** – responsible for bringing instruments and a player and providing music each day
- **Prayer Partner Coordinator** – provides area to leave messages/gifts each night and distributes them
- **Safety Coordinator** - responsible for making sure 1st aid kit is with the group at all times; in charge of the keys to each dorms (two people needed for male/female dorms)
- **Water Team** – makes sure that water is brought to work sites and that people are staying hydrated
- **Work Captains** – during work projects, lead a smaller group, keep them focused, on track and motivated.
- **Attendance Checker (give this job to the person you think will always be last)** – responsible for making sure everyone is accounted for on the bus or other place
- **Trash Team** – makes sure trash is taken care of each day
- **Breakfast Team** – responsible for making and serving breakfast in the morning
- **Clean Up Crew** – responsible for cleaning up from breakfast
- **Chores Coordinator** – organizes the chores and is responsible for assigning chores and ensuring everyone in the group knows their job that day

We are really looking forward to having you and your group in the Dominican Republic! We hope you find this resource packet helpful. If you have any more questions, please contact the Associate Director of Volunteer Engagement at 508-544-4681.