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# Volunteer Guide

Thank you for your interest in volunteering with Blue Sparrow! In this document we lay out your role as a volunteer with the organization, including living with a Peruvian host family and the work you can expect to do. By agreeing to volunteer with Blue Sparrow, you make a commitment to follow these guidelines and fill the post and timeline agreed on. This document was last updated May 2014.

## Volunteer Requirements

You should be 18 or older, speak reasonable Spanish, and commit to at least one consecutive month of work, excluding any personal travel plans.

## About Blue Sparrow

Blue Sparrow is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that seeks to improve quality of life and instill dignity in youth and their families. Our programs target education and agricultural development. By empowering students through education, our goal is for these students to be a force to bring about change in their communities. However, the situation at home is a major factor affecting success at school. Using the school as our hub, we connect with families and integrate them into our agricultural and microfinance projects so the family's overall standard of living can improve.

### *Our work*

Recognizing that development is a holistic process, Blue Sparrow works in four distinct program areas to support kids in their education as well as family life at home. Make sure you've read the [project summaries](#) before continuing. More details on each area are on the [Projects](#) page.

### *Our roots*

In 2010, we launched our first two Conectados projects in the periphery of Lima. Following this we expanded into a rural community high in the Andean mountains near the city of Huancayo, Peru. There, we installed three computer labs and began the Microfinance and HectareMax programs. Why the change in location? Andean communities are generally poorer and less likely to receive aid than coastal communities near Lima. Therefore, we now focus our projects in Andean communities near Huancayo.

## Day to Day

Development work is inherently unpredictable. As much as we help to plan and orient you in advance, your time in Peru will certainly surprise you. Adaptability is key. Likewise, a volunteer position is a job--please take it seriously. This isn't a cheap way to extend your travel or add a bit of international experience to your resumé. Although the program is low-cost and does deeply immerse you in Andean culture, the focus and intent is education and delivering quality teaching to students.

From April to July, we host 8-12 volunteers at a time across 3-4 project locations. From August to March, there are 2-6 volunteers. Volunteers usually live with a partner of the same gender, with a maximum of three volunteers per family. You may be placed in a community alone, but we will generally discuss this with you first.

As a volunteer, your primary work is to support the [Conectados](#) projects in high schools. This can include teaching basic computer skills, assisting teachers in core classes, tutoring, English classes, or extracurricular projects. The school day in Peru is from 8am to 1pm, so some volunteers choose to help in Blue Sparrow's other areas of work as well. When we see that one of your skills is well suited to a particular area, we may ask you to help out there. We aim to provide an open atmosphere so that you can contribute in a way that is appropriate to your interests and in turn benefits the community.

Generally your day/week as a volunteer will look something like this:

### Mon-Fri

School 7:45am-1pm with some breaks or free periods

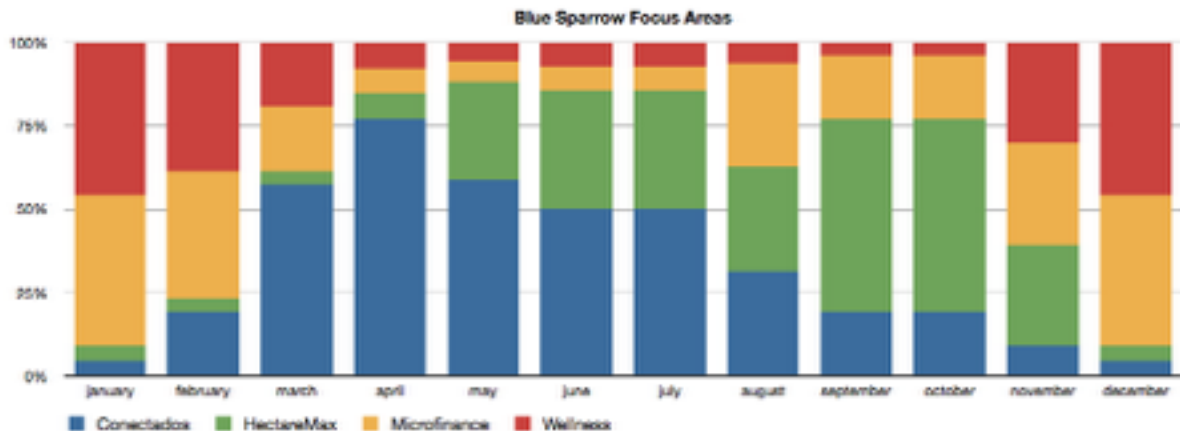
Lunch (1pm-2pm) with family

After School Program 2:30pm-5pm (some locations)

If you are placed at a school that doesn't have an after school program, or you are supporting in another area, that afternoon time will be used to help out in other ways.

**Your weekends are your own.** Depending on the season that we are in, there are agricultural needs which may take place on Saturdays, but this work is optional.

Our work is seasonal, according to the school calendar, climate, and crop harvest. See the chart below for a sense of the main activities in each month. HectareMax and agricultural projects are most active September-May, while Wellness and Microfinance peak November-February. Conectados follows the school calendar, beginning in March and ending in early December.



Before you arrive, we discuss the various volunteering options available to ensure you get the most out of your experience. You can read the [Predeparture Guide](#) online now if you want more details.

Blue Sparrow supports its volunteers by ensuring that the school is receptive of the volunteer and making available the appropriate physical space (computer room or teaching room). We

ensure that volunteers who elect to do “live-in” volunteering have a welcoming family to live with during their time.

Volunteers take on a large degree of independence when organizing and coordinating activities, during their free time and commuting around the city. We will not be permanently present to help you in day-to-day activities. Blue Sparrow does seek to ensure you are safe and well. However, volunteers remain responsible for themselves and their schedule. Take initiative if you feel like you can offer more. When day-to-day challenges arise, rely on your local host family, the school administration or fellow volunteers. It’s all right to make decisions on your own. We can’t and won’t micromanage. Use your judgment to decide at what point you need to involve us. This doesn’t mean that you shouldn’t contact us, or that we aren’t willing to help, but it’s important to understand that Blue Sparrow volunteers are much more independent than many other volunteer programs, and you should be comfortable with that.

Volunteers must speak Spanish at an intermediate level or better. For volunteers who speak Spanish less confidently, Blue Sparrow may require that you take Spanish lessons upon arrival with our recommended teacher (US\$7 per hour) or a language school of your choice. Volunteers are often working and living alone without access to people who speak their mother tongue and may find the situation challenging if they are unable to communicate in Spanish.

## **Accommodation**

The majority of our volunteers choose to stay with local host families, although you can also stay at the Blue Sparrow office or in private accommodation. The cost of accommodation varies. We want our volunteers to make an informed decision about accommodation, and understand the challenges that living with a host family presents.

### **Host Family**

If you choose a host family, you will live in the small towns surrounding our partner schools. We partner with the school community to select host families. This process includes interviews and confirmation by the parents’ association as well as visits by Blue Sparrow. All of the families that we have selected have child(ren) that attend the school where you will be working. You will have your own bedroom or potentially share with another volunteer. Sometimes we place people together so please let us know if you see this being a problem. We do our best to suit the needs of the family, as well as the volunteers.

Please understand that you are going into someone’s house and joining their family. That means you give up certain freedoms in order to gain from the experience of getting to know them. A host family is not a hotel. We ask that the volunteer follows the house rules (which vary from family to family) including hours to be home, meal times, spending time with the family, etc. You are a role model to the kids and a representative of Blue Sparrow. You *absolutely cannot* come home drunk, high, or intoxicated in any form. If this happens, we will give a warning and on the second incident may ask you to leave. This doesn’t mean that you can’t drink or go out--but you need to do those things away from your family, especially the kids.

### **Cost**

The host family program costs S/.450 (450 Peruvian soles, about US\$160) per month. This includes all meals and accommodation and helps to cover Blue Sparrow’s expenses related to

the volunteer program--gas, bedding, staff time, and so on. Blue Sparrow doesn't use the volunteer program as an income source. We fund our projects through grants and donations.

Our program cost is quite low, and therefore volunteers agree to personally assume all costs. These costs can include transport costs to and from your volunteer post, supplemental course materials, weekend stays in the city, entertainment costs and personal medical costs. Most volunteers spend US\$50-100 per month on personal expenses, but your needs may vary.

## Conditions

Blue Sparrow works in impoverished communities and the family you'll be living with will reflect that reality. Pachachaca is significantly more rural and poorer than other communities. Conditions here describe Pachachaca unless otherwise noted. See pictures at our [website](#).

The host family is asked to meet your basic needs including:

- A bed adequately equipped for the location's climate\*
- A place to store your things
- 3 meals a day of what they typically eat--rice, potatoes, and soup
- Water for personal hygiene and for laundry (by hand)
- A welcoming and inclusive family environment allowing the volunteer to integrate, interact and converse with the family.

\*Families sometimes struggle to offer a Western level of sleeping comfort. Blue Sparrow has some spare blankets and will loan these when possible. Be prepared to spend \$15-30 on blankets or a sleeping bag.

Pachachaca's farmers work at subsistence level and have little income to spend on luxury items - almost no one has refrigerators, microwaves, electric cooking ovens or stoves, televisions, computers, washing machines and dryers, hot water or domestic heating. The family you will be living with will cook on an open flame with wood. They wash their clothing by hand and dry it in the sun. Houses are rough adobe mud-brick walls with basic floors and roofs. Their days are filled tending to their animals, working their farms and selling their produce.

All volunteer host families have access to electricity and water--usually a single tap in the yard. Showering may be different than what you are accustomed to. Depending on your family the shower may be as simple as a bucket shower or using the garden hose. There is no hot water. Toilets either don't exist or are squat toilets in a separate hut apart from the main house.

Living with a host family is the highlight of the volunteering experience and an opportunity to learn first-hand about the community and its culture. The families offer you a welcoming environment and genuinely want to share with you and learn about you. You can participate in local events, assist the family with daily chores (i.e. help planting crops or tilling the field), or cook a meal to gain a better understanding of the town's communal or cultural identity. Consider preparing a special meal or buying food to eat with the family for dinner.

You will, of course, spend some time in Huancayo. In the city, you will find laundromats, hot showers, internet cafés, a variety of food, and even some luxuries like Starbucks. This provides an alternative to hand washing and bucket showers. If you want to stay overnight, there are *hospedajes* that range in price from S/. 7 to 40 and have hot water and showers.

Occasionally, we invite the volunteers for dinner at the office in Huancayo. It's a chance to meet volunteers from the other project locations, relax, and recharge. We sometimes ask that everyone pitches a few dollars to cover food costs.

If you feel uncomfortable, remember that Blue Sparrow can always work with you to find a solution such as moving you to a new family, a new location, seeking medical treatment or others. If you feel at risk with the family or community where you are living, it is your right to communicate with a member of our team to improve your experience. If you feel your physical safety is threatened, you have the right at any point, and without prior notice, to leave your volunteer position. Please do not make a significant decision without considering its cultural implications and how it may affect the community's perception of future volunteers and Blue Sparrow. With few exceptions, if you decide to change host families you will also need to change communities, in order to protect the host family's reputation.

### **Other Options**

Blue Sparrow offers our office as a full time live-in option for volunteers. There are a few more amenities (private room, hot showers, WIFI, better sleeping conditions and cooking options). Volunteers might choose to live at the office because of the flexibility to travel between multiple schools, and well as constant internet. However, this is a disadvantage because you are not immersed in the community, and generally will speak more English than Spanish. More of your day will be spent commuting, as we are located on the outskirts/ suburbs of Huancayo.

Office rates are S/. 800 per month or S/. 225 per week, including food.

Jet Li is a budget hotel option in the heart of Huancayo with wifi and hot showers, at a rate of S/. 45 per night. This can be used as a full time option, but is far more expensive and more isolated. It does not include any of your food, and does not have kitchen facilities available.

### **Accommodation Summary**

#### **What we definitely do:**

Arrange it - host family, office, or hostel

Account for explicit special needs: medical, dietary

Acknowledge your needs & set proper expectations about standard of living

Provide a way out if there's trouble

#### **What we will try to do:**

Provide extra blankets, sleeping bags, or pillows

Make you content with your living (wants vs needs)

Develop your understanding of Peruvian culture and living

#### **What we can't/won't do:**

Pay for accommodation or host you at our expense

Change the family's way of life (You accommodate the family; the family cannot accommodate you)

## **Teaching and the Schools**

In the Conectados project, our goal is to first establish basic computer literacy and then develop students' creative capacity. Skills alone will not improve their career options. They need to build self-esteem, curiosity, independence, and confidence as well. The Peruvian education system is heavily based on strict memorization and repetition. For example, students will often copy your sample work, down to your name and age. Breaking through the repetition cycle is a major challenge and the focus of the Conectados program.

One of our tools is our partnership with Adobe Youth Voices (AYV), a project of the Adobe Foundation--creators of Photoshop, Illustrator, and so on. AYV provides a platform for students to critically engage with issues in their surroundings, both by producing and critiquing multimedia work (photos, videos, animation, poems, and music). 2013 is our first year as AYV partners, and so far we are the only AYV partner in Peru. This is a major opportunity and we're excited to take it as far as possible.

### **Your role**

Your role is determined by your skills but most importantly the needs of the school. Key areas include teaching basic computer skills for students, facilitating creativity and curiosity-driven projects, and English.

During the day (8am to 1pm), you will work in the school. This can take many forms and your exact role is determined by the school's needs at the time. In general, expect to work primarily in Computers and English, but also as an assistant in classes like Math, gym, and art. If you have confident Spanish, you might also help in Science or Social Studies classes, too. Class sizes range from 4 to 30 depending on the school. In larger classes especially, the teacher's presence is reduced and you will be an asset in helping keep all students on track.

Blue Sparrow has a curriculum that establishes main topics and skills to learn. Within the curriculum, you may choose to target specific social issues pertinent in the community, such as proper nutrition, teamwork, leadership, goal-setting, low self-esteem or gender issues. You'll work with us and the school's teachers to plan lessons. If you have an interest in other areas, for example in sports, art or photography, talk with us about how to best get involved.

Your involvement with Computer classes varies with each school, from you alone as leader, to you as a helper under the local teacher's direction. Because you are likely more computer literate than anyone at the school, expect to be pushed into a prominent role. If you feel that you're being forced outside your comfort zone, talk to us. Your position is meant to be empowering, not overpowering.

English classes suffer from outdated materials and teachers who have only a bare grasp of the language. You are as an asset for all areas, but for pronunciation and conversation practice in particular. Keep in mind that most English teachers can't even hold conversations and might feel intimidated by your higher level of English.

We will support you with a curriculum guide and information about the work previous volunteers have already done. Remember that the Conectados training is a long process; stay realistic about what you can accomplish in your time here, and be flexible to alter expectations depending on conditions. Blue Sparrow can (depending on content needed and availability) offer more information about the location where you will be working to assist in the planning process.

Be prepared to offer the full range of your abilities--a strength of our program is the diversity of talents that volunteers bring. You might organize a sports tournament, teach a song, or

learn a Peruvian dance. Of course, during school hours you are under the authority of the director who will determine scheduling and where the school has a need for your help. The after school programs are entirely up to Blue Sparrow to manage.

## Teaching Summary

### What we definitely do:

- Match the school's needs to your background and interests
- Provide teaching guidance and curriculum materials
- Acknowledge the school's final authority

### What we will try to do:

- Help establish a preliminary teaching schedule before you arrive
- Resolve concerns (teaching schedule, respect, classroom involvement)
- Maintain consistency in scheduling and attendance - for both you and the staff
- Give notice of upcoming school holidays
- Mediate issues that can't be resolved independently

### What we can't/won't do:

- Guarantee particular subjects, hours, attendance
- Contradict school's stated needs
- Write your lesson plan for you

## Health, Food & Nutrition

**We do not provide insurance of any kind.** You should arrange this separately or be prepared to absorb any additional costs. Blue Sparrow can offer recommendations of medical treatment or other services as needed. There are many clinics available in Huancayo, as well as hospitals, dentists, and massage therapists. There are also well-equipped pharmacies.

You will be living with a family who will serve you typical Andean food. Potatoes or rice are served with every meal. Vegetables like carrots, peas, lima beans and corn are sometimes served. Occasionally, your family will have a small bit of meat such as chicken, lamb or beef. Meat is a luxury. There is not much dairy in the Peruvian diet, except in the form of *queso fresco* (like feta). Andean food, unlike on the coast, is not heavily spiced. Peruvian breakfast can include bread with cheese, egg or fried sweet potatoes and a hot drink. In Pachachaca, your breakfast may consist of soup or a hot plate of food. You could also be served soup like *sopa verde* (a potato soup with herbs) or *mote*, with corn and beef. Lunch is the largest meal of the day. Dinner can be the same size as lunch or smaller.

Food in the families is very basic, and we do not ask them to change their diet to accommodate volunteers' preferences. The program cost is based on this fact. Many volunteers go into the center to pick up groceries or have a meal to supplement their diet. In general, the food is safe to eat and the water (once boiled) is safe to drink.

If you have specific dietary requirements, it should be communicated well in advance. When possible and appropriate, work constructively with the family to resolve any issues. Blue Sparrow representatives can mediate as necessary.

## Cultural Considerations and Respect

Blue Sparrow's relationship with the schools, families and communities where we work is crucially important. You are a representative of Blue Sparrow and have a very strong influence on the community's perception of volunteers and our work.

In all ventures, Blue Sparrow respects the culture, beliefs, and ways of thinking and opinions of the schools, families and schools with which we work. The mutual respect exhibited by our staff and volunteers helps preserve and grow our relationships and without it, our ability to work can be jeopardized. We ask you as a volunteer to be conscious of the importance of this respect as you experience life in a community that may be very different from your own.

Politics and religion are controversial topics. Privately, such as with your host family or a small group of friends, be open and honest. Part of the cultural exchange lies in differing viewpoints. In public situations, please moderate your opinions.

Alcohol, drugs, and sex may be viewed very differently in Peru than in your home country. Your private time on weekends and away from your post is yours to use as you wish. However, at any point that you might be identified as a Blue Sparrow representative, we ask that you carefully consider your actions.

If we feel that you are not being a responsible representative of the organization, not fulfilling the goals of the volunteer program, or if your involvement negatively affects our work, we will discuss these problems and look for a solution. If the situation doesn't improve, we may ask you to leave. If this happens, you should be prepared to make your own arrangements for the remainder of your time in Peru. A decision to remove a volunteer is serious and rare. We must protect the community and our reputation, but be assured that we do not take a decision like this lightly. In all but the most extreme cases, you will be informed in advance of our concerns and offered time to adjust.

### Culture Summary

#### What we accept/expect:

Respect your family and attempt to integrate

Moderate your opinions and avoid gossip--you represent Blue Sparrow

#### What we will try to do:

Orient you to the cultural expectations (greetings, dress, etc)

Provide cultural context for events and decisions

Help you be comfortable without upsetting or reflecting badly on your host family

#### What we can't/won't accept:

Disrespect toward family, school, or NGO

Harming family's reputation in the community (talking about them, public drunkenness)

## Communication



You must provide weekly reports to update the Blue Sparrow team on your progress, opinions and any challenges faced. Blue Sparrow will check in to discuss the report and offer support based on issues raised. We strongly suggest a cell phone with a local Peruvian number to communicate with members of the team. (Blue Sparrow has a limited number of phones available for loan. You can buy a local phone for US\$40.) The team will use this telephone number to check in to ensure you are not having problems and to assist with any concerns. If you are having a problem that cannot be solved independently, please do not hesitate to let us know. You can reach us by cell phone or email. Specific contact info will be provided before you arrive.

**What we definitely do:**

Weekly report followup & discussion

Arrange for a mode of immediate contact (loan/buy a phone, family, email)

**What we will try to do:**

Provide a cell phone when available

Weekly in-person visits

Aid in solving problems (host family, school, volunteer group) that can not be solved by the volunteer by pulling from local resources

**What we can't/won't do:**

Provide phone credit

Pay for your phone or SIM Card

## Transportation

Local transportation is covered in the Predeparture Guide specific to your volunteer post location. All of our locations are accessible by public transport or taxi. Your international flight will arrive in Lima. You will take a bus to Huancayo (8 hours), where we will meet you. If needed, we can coordinate airport pickup in Lima, a hostel for the night, and your bus to Huancayo with reputable companies.

**What we definitely do:**

Provide recommendations and instructions to arrive in Huancayo

Explain how to go to and from location; explain main risks associated with transport

Provide a map and indication of local amenities: market, school, hospital

Accompany you on your first day of work to introduce you to your family and the school

**What we will try to do:**

Arrange taxi+hostel+bus transfer from Lima to Huancayo, if needed

**What we can't/won't do:**

Pay for trips: personal or business

Guarantee personal pickup at the airport in Lima or personally transfer you to the Lima bus station—but we can arrange for this through reputable companies in the city

## Climate

Huancayo has a climate of extremes and is the opposite of Lima's coastal climate - when it's summer in Lima, it is cold and rainy in Huancayo. During Lima's winter, it is sunny and dry in Huancayo. The weather changes very rapidly in mountains. It can be sunny, hail, rain and go back to being sunny all in one day. In transition months (Sept-Oct and April-May) expect a wide variety of weather and pack for both seasons.

### Summer: May-September

The daytime temperature reaches between 25 and 30°C (75-85 F). At night, the temperature drops drastically to -10 to 0°C (20-30 F). The sun is very strong due to the time of year and the altitude. Most days are sunny and dry, and rain is rare. After sunset, it gets cold quickly. Be prepared with many warm layers, a windproof jacket and warm clothes to sleep in. Pack with these extremes in mind.

### Winter: October-April

There is much less variation in temperatures. In the daytime temperature range from 8-20°C (45-70 F) and can drop to 0-5°C (32-40 F) at night. Again, we would recommend bringing layers and a good rain-resistant jacket, as it does get very cold and rainy. Thick mud forms during the rainy season so bring a good pair of shoes that you can walk in and don't mind getting dirty. Also, be prepared for the cold nights by bringing warm clothes to sleep in. January through March are the rainiest months.

### Altitude

Plan to arrive a few days before your Blue Sparrow assignment begins to adjust to the culture, language, and altitude. Our office in Huancayo is at approximately 3300m (10,500ft) above sea level. Pachachaca is higher still, at 3700m.

Take it easy in the first days. Avoid running or exercise until you've acclimated. Physical health has little to do in predicting altitude sickness, and everyone is susceptible. Altitude sickness (*soroche*) is much more likely if you strain your body in the first days. It can also present itself weeks after arriving. *Soroche* begins as a painful headache and continues into diarrhea and vomiting. Your host family knows the signs and treatment for *soroche* and will offer you a terrible tasting herbal tea. Drink it. Stay in bed for at least a day until you've recovered. Only in extreme cases is medical treatment necessary. Take time to read [http://wikitravel.org/en/Altitude\\_sickness](http://wikitravel.org/en/Altitude_sickness) for more information.

## Final Thoughts

This guide is an overview of Blue Sparrow's volunteer program and provides expectations of your living and teaching experience. After committing to the program, read through the [Predeparture Guide](#) that covers the specifics and offers suggestions for packing, arriving in Peru, and so on.

Development work is inherently unpredictable. Conditions, plans, and costs may change during your stay. Adaptability is key to a great volunteer experience.