



THE NOLA TREE

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The NOLA Tree is an IRS 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that operates youth volunteer programs and community development initiatives in New Orleans and around the nation.

1. How much will the program cost?

The cost of each one-week program is \$550. This sum covers the cost of a volunteer's meals, accommodations, ground transportation, trip insurance and fuel charge.

The \$550 does not include the cost of airfare. The NOLA Tree makes a group air travel reservation so that volunteers travel to New Orleans together (all volunteers begin and end a program at the same time). In most cases, airfare to and from New Orleans will be around \$300, but this can vary considerably.

Some or all of the cost of a volunteer's airfare may be tax deductible. Please consult with your individual tax preparer to determine the extent to which it is.

2. I don't think I can afford to attend the program. Is financial aid available?

Yes.

In 2011, The NOLA Tree will be able to provide financial assistance to some volunteers. Those volunteers requesting/requiring financial aid must contact The NOLA Tree prior to or immediately following submitting an application.

3. How much fundraising will volunteers have to do prior to the program?

That depends.

While The NOLA Tree does not require our volunteers to fundraise, it is our hope and expectation that they will engage in fundraising activities. Money raised by volunteers can be used to a) help cover a volunteer's individual programming costs, b) help fund another volunteer's programming costs, or c) help pay for general programming fees. The NOLA Tree provides fundraising tools, strategies and support, and through the sale of tee shirts and email campaigns, many volunteers raise significant sums of money. In fact, last year, one volunteer raised enough money to cover *all* of her program fees *and* provide financial assistance to *three* other volunteers.

Also, note that a percentage of the money raised may be tax deductible (at present, that amount is yet to be determined).

4. How do we pay for the program?

Upon submitting an application, a volunteer must pay a \$25.00 processing fee. This processing fee goes toward the cost of the volunteer's program. The processing fee is fully refundable, except in those instances where a volunteer is accepted to one of his/her program choices but chooses not to attend.



Once a volunteer has been accepted, there are a couple of payment options. If a volunteer can pay the entire programming cost at once, please do. Then, once we have the cost of the flight, we will request payment for that.

Of course, we understand that many volunteers need to pay in installments, so we will establish a payment schedule. Generally speaking, it will look something like this: The first payment will be for \$250. Payment will be due shortly after a volunteer has been accepted into the program. Then the volunteer will be expected to pay for the airfare (a to-be-determined amount). Finally, the volunteer will pay the remaining \$275 balance.

Payments can be made via check payable to The NOLA Tree, PayPal (an extra 3% surcharge is added to the program cost when paying via PayPal, bringing the total cost to \$565) or bank transfer (once again, an additional surcharge will be added to the program cost when paying via bank transfer, bringing the total cost to \$565).

5. Can a volunteer stay longer than one week?

Yes. In 2011, depending on space and demand, volunteers may be able to stay for more than one program. However, volunteers cannot add additional days to a program (nor may volunteers stay for less than one week). Note that volunteers attending more than one program will not be eligible to receive financial assistance from The NOLA Tree.

6. Who volunteers? Will volunteers with The NOLA Tree interact with volunteers from other groups?

In 2011, volunteers will be between the ages of 15 and 19. Most of the volunteers will be in high school, but some may be first or second year college students.

While working with the local non-profit organizations, as well as while staying at housing such as Camp Hope, volunteers with The NOLA Tree will have the opportunity to meet many other volunteers, including members of Americorps.

7. Will volunteers have to attend meetings before the program?

Yes.

Volunteers are required to attend one or two meetings prior to the program. Parents or guardians of volunteers under the age of 18 are expected to attend at least one of these meetings. At The NOLA Tree, we understand that many volunteers have busy schedules (sports team commitments, after school jobs, family obligations, etc.). Every effort will be made to work around potential conflicts, but it will not always be possible.

Of course, we recognize that not all participants reside in the same locale. When necessary, The NOLA will coordinate and facilitate online meetings using Skype or iChat. In addition, groups and/or fan pages will be set up on Facebook or other social networking sites so that volunteers from various geographic regions can “meet” one another in advance.

8. What is a typical volunteer workday like?

Long!

The workday usually begins at 8 A.M., which means volunteers are required to be at the job site by 7:30 A.M. Work lasts until 5 P.M. Often, the work runs past 5 P.M., depending on what needs to be finished up



at the end of the day. Volunteers work a five-day week.

9. What type of work will volunteers be doing?

It varies.

Volunteers do the work that no one else wants to do. Often times, that is work no one else is willing to do. This is especially the case with unskilled volunteers, like volunteers with The NOLA Tree.

We volunteer with [lowernine.org](http://www.lowernine.org) (<http://www.lowernine.org>), a non-profit organization, helping to rebuild the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans, the St. Bernard Project (<http://www.stbernardproject.org>), a non-profit, direct service organization that works in both St. Bernard Parish and Orleans Parish, Common Ground Relief, (<http://www.commongroundrelief.org>), a non-profit organization that provides short-term aid to victims of disasters in the Gulf Coast region, and other non-profit groups.

The local non-profit organizations give volunteers their daily job assignments which may include putting up plasterboard (mudding, taping, sanding), framing a foundation, gardening projects, working at a summer camp or daycare facility, helping to restore wetlands, building playgrounds, painting or tiling.

However, it is important for volunteers to keep in mind that on some days, the job assignments may not be particularly “glamorous.” Volunteers could be asked to clear yards of weeds and overgrowth, organize job-sites for skilled workers, or even clean kitchens and bathrooms. Nevertheless, at The NOLA Tree, we make sure our volunteers are not “stuck” doing the same unpleasant task all week.

Finally, safety takes precedent over everything else. All the local non-profits we work with in New Orleans require at least one chaperone for every five volunteers. The organizations also provide volunteers with hands-on instruction, close supervision, and additional safety equipment. Volunteers under the age of 18 will not be permitted to engage in any activities considered dangerous (roofing, operating power tools, etc.) without expressed parental consent.

10. Where will volunteers be staying?

In 2011, we hope our volunteers will stay at Camp Hope, a volunteer base camp in Arabi, which is maintained by St. Bernard Parish with the aid of Americorps. Camp Hope is a short drive to our work sites in the Lower Ninth Ward, St. Bernard Parish, and elsewhere. The facility is a converted middle school. Volunteers sleep on bunk beds in classrooms arranged by gender. The facility has showers, air conditioning, internet access, and lockers. All volunteers are required to help maintain the facilities. Daily chores may be assigned.

However, last summer, BP took over Camp Hope in order to house workers assisting in the Gulf of Mexico oil spill cleanup. At this time, we don't know if the facility will be available. If it is not, every attempt will be made to find similar, communal housing. If alternative communal housing cannot be secured, volunteers may stay at the Marina Motel Chalmette. This is where volunteers stayed during our summer 2010 programs. Four or five volunteers will sleep on cots and/or beds in each room.

11. How do meals work?

If volunteers stay at Camp Hope, two meals (breakfast and dinner) are served every day. At breakfast, volunteers prepare their bag lunch for the day, which they take to their job site.

Volunteers with dietary restrictions (vegan, vegetarian, kosher, etc.) must inform The NOLA Tree prior to



the program. However, due to the nature of the program, not all dietary restrictions can be accommodated.

In addition, while there is plenty to eat at the meals, our volunteers are almost always hungry. Thus, we provide our volunteers with ample opportunities to purchase additional snacks. The NOLA Tree does not cover the cost of these additional food purchases.

If Camp Hope is not available in 2011, every attempt will be made to implement a similar meal program.

12. Who will be chaperoning the programs in New Orleans?

In 2011, at least one member of The NOLA Tree staff will attend each program. All new and/or non-staff chaperones must satisfy minimum age and education requirements, possess a valid driver's license, and be willing to submit to a background check. They must also attend chaperone workshops/meetings, and like our volunteers, chaperones must sign a Code of Conduct contract.

Parents and adults interested in serving as chaperones should submit an application (available through our website).

13. How will volunteers get around New Orleans?

In New Orleans, The NOLA Tree rents vans, which are driven by chaperones. The vans are air-conditioned and seat ten to twelve people comfortably. Volunteers are expected to keep the vans neat. If a rental car agency assesses a surcharge because a van isn't clean upon return, all volunteers will be required to pay the fine.

14. What will volunteers do in the evenings and at night?

Each evening, a nightly debrief session is held. For about an hour, volunteers sit in a circle and talk about the day, discuss issues, and share experiences and viewpoints. Debriefs are a critical part of The NOLA Tree experience.

Some evenings (when we're not too exhausted), we may also do an organized group activity -- go out for ice cream, listen to live music, go swimming, explore a new neighborhood, visit with a local family, etc.

15. Will volunteers get to see the French Quarter and other New Orleans attractions?

Absolutely!

In addition to the volunteer work, it is important that volunteers get a sense of what New Orleans is all about. Each group spends at least one afternoon or evening in the French Quarter. Volunteers get the opportunity to shop for souvenirs and sample beignets at Café du Monde. Groups also explore other neighborhoods such as the Garden District, the West Bank, Treme, Uptown, Gentilly, Lakeview, the Marigny. Groups see Habitat for Humanity's Musicians' Village, Ron Lewis's House of Dance and Feathers Museum, Brad Pitt's Make it Right homes, The Green Project, and the Lower Ninth Village. Some groups visit Audubon Park. Others ride the Canal Street Ferry or a streetcar along St. Charles Avenue.

Volunteers also learn about the New Orleans levee system. Volunteers visit a number of areas so that they're able to see firsthand what the levees are like in the city's different neighborhoods.



16. Is the Lower Ninth Ward safe? Is New Orleans safe?

New Orleans is a major city, and like all big cities, crime can be an issue. While potential dangers do exist, The NOLA Tree works to provide a wholly safe and secure experience. Rules and regulations regarding volunteer safety are established prior to the program and then again in New Orleans.

17. What happens in case of emergency?

If a volunteer requires medical attention, he/she will be taken to one of several medical facilities, each of which is between 10-20 minutes from our work sites. Of course, parents or guardians are notified immediately. An extensive medical information and release form -- requiring notarization -- is part of the accepted volunteer application packet.

The NOLA Tree requires that all volunteers be up to date with immunizations. Volunteers must provide the date of his/her last tetanus shot,

18. What happens if a volunteer breaks the rules?

The NOLA Tree has strict rules and guidelines. All volunteers are expected to abide by them. Volunteers (and a parent/guardian) are required to sign a Code of Conduct Contract prior to the program. This contract covers behavioral expectations, drinking, illicit activities, etc. If a volunteer violates the Code of Conduct Contract, parents will be contacted, and the volunteer will be asked to leave the program immediately at his/her own cost.

19. What will the weather be like?

That all depends on when a volunteer is in New Orleans.

Most of our programs take place during the summer when it is hot, hot, hot! And humid, too! From July to September, daytime temperatures are almost always in the nineties.

The spring months are transitional ones. It's not uncommon for there to be a stretch of ninety degree days as early as the first week of April. However, in other years, the thermometer may not reach the ninety-degree mark until the end of May.

In the fall months, it cools down considerably. Temperatures are generally in the seventies and eighties, and the humidity is much more bearable.

Weather-wise, the best time to volunteer is from December to March, although the weather can be somewhat unpredictable. One day the temperatures may be in the seventies, and the next day the thermometer could struggle to reach fifty. In December 2004 and then again in December 2008, it snowed in New Orleans!

20. What do volunteers need to bring with them to New Orleans?

Prior to the program, volunteers receive an extensive and detailed packing list. The itemized list covers clothing, bedding, footwear, safety gear, toiletries, and miscellaneous items ranging from cameras to musical instruments to proper identification. The packing list is posted in downloadable form on our website.



21. How much spending money does a volunteer need?

We recommend that volunteers bring approximately \$100 in spending money. Volunteers often wish to purchase additional snacks and beverages for the evening hours (we frequently stop at Walgreens and Winn-Dixie). The local sno-ball and ice cream trucks are also very popular (especially during the summer months). Many volunteers purchase souvenirs -- tee shirts, beads, books, etc. Finally, extra cash should be set aside for travel days. Flight delays are commonplace, airports are expensive, and most airlines now routinely charge \$20-30 per checked bag each way.

22. What will be expected of volunteers after returning from New Orleans?

After New Orleans, volunteers are expected to stay involved with The NOLA Tree. Continued commitment initiatives are coordinated so that volunteers can organize, facilitate and participate in programs and projects within their own neighborhoods. Volunteers will also be asked to speak to other potential volunteers about The NOLA Tree. Finally, volunteers are expected to complete a post-New Orleans questionnaire and survey.

23. If a school has a community service requirement, can a volunteer get credit?

Yes. A volunteer can receive community service. The NOLA Tree has a community service form that will be provided to volunteers who request it upon completion of the program. It is the sole responsibility of the volunteer to make sure a particular school will honor the service honors performed.