

English Volunteers for Change (EVOLC)

Executive Summary

The political and economic stability of Costa Rica, along with its natural and cultural beauty, have made it an attractive destination for tourism and foreign direct investment (FDI). Nevertheless, this situation has created various challenges for the country, including developing foreign-language skills. Improving multilingual communication in the country has a positive impact on services offered to tourists, and it opens more opportunities for citizens to acquire new information on social and professional interaction.

On March 11th, 2008, former Nobel Peace Prize Recipient and President Oscar Arias Sánchez presented the national initiative “Costa Rica Multilingüe,” (CRML) which seeks to improve the competitive environment of the country by increasing the number of English speakers in the country. The program has short- and long-term goals: by the end of 2010, it seeks to train 75,000 people in different levels of English mastery. By 2017 CRML, hopes to provide 100% of high-school graduates with an intermediate or high level of English, according to the Common European Framework, which classifies basic users of a language as A1 or A2, independent users as B1 or B2, and competent users as C1 or C2.

A preliminary diagnostic to examine the supply and demand of bilingual personnel in Guanacaste - paradoxically the region with the highest tourist activity but also one of the poorest in the country - executed by ALIARSE in conjunction with tourism entrepreneurs, allows us to identify the obstacles of improving levels of English:

- English classes offered by the National Learning Institute (Instituto Nacional de Aprendizaje, or INA) are limited.
- There are 16 vacant positions for INA English teachers in Guanacaste.
- The lack of English teachers is due to migration into the Central Valley in search of higher-paying jobs (i.e. Call centers).
- The private sector is worried about the low levels of English of Guanacaste residents.

To improve the amount of English speakers in the country’s tourism regions, it is necessary to: (i) offer more English classes; (ii) increase the number of English teachers; and (iii) modify INA courses

to integrate cultural aspects and professional skills aligned to the tourism sector, in addition to language skills.

In recent years, ALIARSE and EVOLC have expanded their territory to reach more Costa Ricans in need of English Language skills. To achieve the long-term goals of Costa Rica Multilingüe, it is necessary to invest in the training of English teachers in public, primary, and secondary schools. It is also essential to invest in English language training for existing personnel in corporations and businesses located in Costa Rica. This will allow employees to advance in the company, as well as promote social responsibly within the business realm of Costa Rica.

English Volunteers for Change (EVOLC) Mission: To contribute to the government sponsored initiative to make Costa Rica a multilingual country by 2017. We will accomplish our mission by recruiting English speaking volunteers to aid in improving English language skills amongst local residents in rural tourism communities, impoverished communities, public schools and the private business sector in the country.

The project was developed through both international and national public-private alliances. Its initial partners were the ALIARSE Foundation, Costa Rica Multilingüe, the Costa Rican Tourism Institute (ICT), the Public Education Ministry (MEP), the U.S. Embassy, Península Papagayo, the Local Chambers of Tourism, and tourism-sector businesses.

The first five volunteers arrived in Costa Rica on January 30th, 2009, for a minimum period of six months; however EVOLC expects 100 volunteers to participate in the project during the next five years. The first volunteers offered classes in El Coco, Sardinal, Guardia, Belén and Cartagena in Guanacaste. Currently, EVOLC has expanded to the central and south pacific coast, the Caribbean, and the central valley. The project will help resolve the aforementioned challenges by extending volunteer participation throughout the country.

The project is developed in three modes: Volunteer English Professors will volunteer their services (i) with high-school students, primarily from technical high schools; and public middle and elementary schools (ii) with professionals from the rural and/or tourism sector, primarily from large hotels, and with employees from public institutions in tourism communities (iii) to existing personnel within businesses and corporations located in Costa Rica to promote corporate responsibility.

Foreign professors who are fluent in English will teach the English classes. Each volunteer will ideally have a university degree and credentials to teach English as a second language, such as a TEFL, TESOL, or CELTA certificate. The volunteer selection process includes a personal interview, an online application, and two letters of recommendation. Volunteers with previous experience teaching English and those that have travelled abroad before are preferred to those volunteers who do not have these qualifications.

Classes throughout the country are offered for 5 weeks to 1 year, and the volunteers are responsible for organizing their own schedule based on the needs of their student with the support of the local partners (i.e. Costa Rica Multilingüe, the local Chamber of Tourism, Instituto Nacional de Aprendizaje or *National Learning Institute*, local public school, etc.) who promote the classes, identify interested participants, and organize enrollment. Each potential student participates in an interview to identify their English level and available schedule. Generally, each course has a maximum of 30 students and each teacher is in class for 20 hours per week, and is responsible for 20 hours a week to prepare lesson plans and correct assignments and exams.

Below is a list of all the programs we offer, durations, locations:

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| • <i>Short-Term Community Service</i> | 6-12 weeks | Central Valley |
| • <i>Local Development</i> | 6-12 months | Nationwide |
| • <i>University Practicum Program</i> | 4-8 weeks | Central Valley |
| • <i>Public School Assistance</i> | 6-12 months | Central Valley |
| • <i>Corporate Responsibility</i> | 6-12 months | Central Valley |
| • <i>Assistant Teacher with the</i> | 3 months | Nationwide |
| Instituto Nacional de Aprendizaje | | |

The **materials** used by the teachers in class have been carefully selected and reviewed by ALIARSE. All students will take an entrance and exit exam, and receive attendance **certificates** from ALIARSE.

Volunteers with teaching credentials will participate in a 3-5 day orientation and travel to their respective communities where they will live with a Cost Rican host family, receive a private room and 3 meals per day. Teachers will have the option to apply a visa with volunteer status for one year, through a volunteer/intern regulation emitted by the Immigration Administration in 2007. We only recommend applying for the Visa for volunteers staying with our program in Costa Rica for at least one year.

The costs of the programs range between *no cost* (aside from the \$500 deposit fee) and \$4900 dependant on the chosen program and duration. All programs include 3 meals/day, lodging,

teaching materials, transportation to teaching community, 3-5 day orientation with meals and hotel included, cultural activities and field trips, and 24-hour support from Program Coordinator. The insurance costs, and transportation from the home country to Costa Rica will be paid by the volunteer, with the exception of the *Corporate Responsibility Option* which includes full flight reimbursement.

Foundation for Sustainability and Equity (ALIARSE)

The Foundation for Sustainability and Equity, known as ALIARSE, was established on 19 July 2006 with the legal identification number 3-006-450467.

ALIARSE is an initiative of public institutions and private businesses that, conscious of the economic, social and environmental challenges the country faces, and in service of their social responsibility, have joined forces to contribute to the sustainable development of the country. ALIARSE acts as a catalyst to strengthen a national culture committed to social responsibility for sustainable development in Costa Rica.

ALIARSE was created in June 2007 under the leadership and collaboration of national and international businesses such as Bridgestone, Cemex, Chiquita Brands, Clínica Bíblica, Grupo Comeca, Intel, Oikocredit, Península Papagayo and Grupo Purdy, and public institutions such as Acueductos y Alcantarillados (AyA), Banco de Costa Rica, Grupo ICE and the Costa Rican Oil Refinery (Recope). The International Center for Human Development (CIDH) is the Technical Secretary of the initiative.

ALIARSE Mission:

To promote and strengthen a culture of social responsibility for the creation of value, generation of knowledge, interchange of experiences, development of capacities and public-private alliances for the sustainable development of Costa Rica.

Specific benefits of public-private alliances (APPs) are:

- The improvement of employability and productivity in the workforce.
- The improvement of public and occupational health.
- Environmental management with an emphasis on the sustainable management of water and energy resources.
- Promoting links among municipalities, the private sector and communities for local development.



ALIARSE contributes to its mission through:

- The generation of knowledge: systemizing successful experiences.
- The exchange of good business: conversations, workshops, conferences, and virtual forums.
- Forming public opinion regarding the importance of public-private interaction for the country's development.
- The promotion of public-private alliances: specific projects aligned with Costa Rica's development strategy.