

Guide for Congregations: Service Delegations to the US-Mexico Border



Overview

HIAS works with several organizations in borderland cities to serve the needs of individuals and families seeking asylum in the United States. Several of our partners – in Albuquerque, Phoenix, San Diego, and Tijuana – operate emergency, short-term shelters that offer support and other resources to asylum seekers after they have been released from detention and have ongoing needs for in person volunteer support. These shelters provide basic services, such as food and lodging, assistance in making travel arrangements, clean clothing, medical check-ups, children’s activities, and transportation to bus stations and airports as asylum seekers continue their journeys to their cities of final destination, where they will proceed with their cases for legal asylum in the U.S.

HIAS connects congregations to our partners for service trips that last anywhere from three days to two weeks to provide such support. The following information will help you determine if your congregation is a good fit for this effort.

What happens during a delegation?

Congregational service delegations are entirely dedicated to enhancing our partners’ capacities to serve their clients’ urgent needs. Volunteers perform discrete tasks that help expand the ability of the organizations to do their work. Examples of tasks include:

- Sorting and distributing clothing donations
- Preparing and serving meals
- Facilitating children’s activities
- Escorting families to the bus station or airport
- Know Your Rights presentations
- Cleaning
- Interpretation help - volunteers fluent in less common languages are particularly useful (includes: French, Haitian Creole, Tigrinya, Arabic, Farsi, Kanjobal, other indigenous languages, and Russian)
- Medical checks (limited opportunities)

Most of our partners assign individuals within a group to various tasks based on what is needed in a given moment. Though there is no guarantee, some of the shelters do occasionally have opportunities for groups to work together on projects, such as assembling travel bags or decorating areas of the shelter to brighten the space for their guests.

Who should participate?

Each delegation should consist of six to ten volunteers. All volunteers must be 18 years of age or older (this is a non-negotiable requirement). Fluency in Spanish is neither required nor necessary; however, individuals who are fluent may have the opportunity to take on specific tasks such as conducting client intakes or supporting Know Your Rights Workshops.

What is the time commitment for participants?

Opportunities vary by location from three to four days to up to two weeks. Participants should likely be able to commit to a week and must be available to work from 9:00 AM—6:00 PM each day of the delegation (with exceptions for Shabbat observance in accordance with practice). Additionally, all participants are required to participate in a HIAS-led webinar training prior to departure, as well as a pre-trip briefing call and a post-trip call to process the experience and discuss ways to take action from home.

What is the cost for participants?

Participants are responsible for all logistics and expenses related to travel, lodging, meals, and any other costs associated with the delegation.

What is HIAS' role?

HIAS staff will help you determine if this opportunity is right for your congregation, and, if yes, will connect your group to one of our partners. If you are able to proceed, partner organization staff will help you navigate the logistics of the trip, including recommendations for hotels, car rentals and meals. HIAS will facilitate a pre-trip briefing call and a post-trip processing and planning call (mentioned above). Regrettably, at this time HIAS staff are not able to accompany congregational service delegations. However, upon return, we will support your congregation in thinking through post-trip next steps and connect you to the many other ways to take action from home.

How can we help, if a congregational delegation isn't right for us?

All of our partners are in need of both specific items on their “wish lists” and general financial support. We are happy to provide you with details upon request. For other ways to take action, please visit [HIAS's Take Action for Asylum Seekers](#) page.

Once you have discussed this opportunity with your community, please contact Isabel Burton, Senior Director of Community Engagement Initiatives, at isabel.burton@HIAS.org for further information.