

Service Visit Frequently Asked Questions



CORD USA Winter Service Visit 2026

Must be read and understood by all participants and their parents before applying.
For optimal communication, please reach out with a question ONLY IF that is NOT addressed here.

1. What is the service project?

An opportunity offered by CORD USA for Bala Vihar youth from the United States and Canada to volunteer at one of our CORD centers in India.

2. How will my child benefit from this project?

Volunteering directly with the less privileged will provide them with a wonderful opportunity for inner growth and development of the student.

3. What is the duration of this project?

Approximately two weeks, it is not possible to attend part-time. Students & chaperones will not be allowed to leave the program in the middle, unless in case of emergency.

4. What is the eligible age to participate?

Student volunteers must be 15 years of age by this December **and** be a 10th grader or above. The student must be currently enrolled in the Bala Vihar program in order to apply. Continuous enrollment for the past few years with good attendance is preferred.

5. What is the timeline of the application process?

Applications are initially open only for chaperones. The chaperone application will be open for six weeks or as soon as we **select** the chaperones needed for the trip. Only after that will student applications be open. Student applications will be open for two months or till we **select** the number of students needed for the trip. When you register, an acknowledgement message will be sent to you. This is not a confirmation of your participation. After the selection, emails will be sent with a list of all the students who are confirmed to attend the service visit. Students and chaperones who were not selected will also be notified, so there is no need to check with us about the update. **Please do NOT buy tickets until you receive the confirmation email.**

Selection is done by a team of national and regional coordinators after a thorough review process, and their decisions are final.

6. What will the student be doing as part of this volunteer program?

The activities involve working with the various programs that CORD offers, including field visits. These activities include but are not limited to interacting with Bala Vihar children, adolescent girls, differently abled, and Mahila Mandal groups. Several days of physical labor, such as village clean up, building toilets, digging azolla pits, and building compost pits, are built into the activities. Students must be prepared to perform physical activities in warm sunny weather. Clothes and shoes will get dirty during the field activities. Hiking and walking are necessary parts of the field activity. Students as well as chaperones must have the physical ability to engage in these activities without assistance.

7. What is expected of the student?

After the list of students is finalized, there will be several online meetings leading up to the visit. Students are expected to attend all of these meetings. This trip is driven by the motivation and active participation of the students. Missing two or more meetings will make a student ineligible to participate in the service visit.

During the service visit, students must strictly adhere to all volunteer guidelines of the host facility and follow the instructions of the chaperones at all times. Failure to comply with these directions will result in the immediate termination of the student's participation in the service visit. Wearing modest outfits during the visit is mandatory and is essential to upholding the integrity and success of the program.

Please note that attendance alone does not guarantee service hour credit. Each student's conduct, participation, and adherence to all expectations will be reviewed to determine eligibility for service hours. **Inappropriate behavior or disregard for program rules may lead to disqualification or termination from the visit.**

After returning from the service visit, students are required to volunteer for at least one CORDUSA project within the same academic year. Guidance on suitable local projects will be provided. **Please apply only if you are committed to fulfilling this post-visit service requirement.**

8. What are the Registration fees and the overall cost of the program?

The charge for the trip is \$1500 per person (students and chaperones). At the time of registration, an online payment link will be provided for a \$250 **non-refundable** registration fee. Once the student is accepted to the service visit, an online payment of \$1250 needs to be made within three days of notification. All payments are non-refundable. The charge of \$1500 will cover boarding, food, and project transportation **after** the student/chaperone reaches the CORD center at the commencement of the trip. Airfare to India is the responsibility of each individual participant.

Participants are required to pay \$125 via Zelle to the assigned chaperone before the trip for any incidental expenses. Incidental expenses include transportation to the CORD facility at the beginning of the trip, and to get back from the CORD center at the end of the trip, and other expenses during the trip. Unless they choose otherwise, the remainder of the money will be returned to them by the chaperones at the end of the trip upon return to the USA/Canada.

Chaperones arrange the travel between the muster point and the CORD center and back to the muster point. There is no other charge or fee for the service visit itself. Additional individual contributions to support local projects are welcome.

9. How can I apply?

Applications are submitted online via the CORD USA website. Application is considered complete only after the online form is completed and submitted **along** with the release of liability form, and payment of the initial registration fee.

Both parents and students must sign the release of liability form. You will need to fill out the correct email for the Bala Vihar teacher evaluation, as this is how the feedback form will be sent to the teacher. The Bala Vihar teacher must be the current teacher who is teaching the student in the current academic year. He/she must fill the form in a week's time; it is the student's responsibility to check with the teacher and verify if the feedback was filled. **The application is complete only after we receive the teacher/acharya evaluation form filled out by the teacher.** Note that the teacher evaluation form will be automatically emailed to the email provided by you, and **we are not responsible for any email typos in your application form or bounced emails.**

All these components are necessary for the application to be considered complete. Once the completed application is received with all the components, the regional CORD USA coordinator will call the student before the registration deadline to discuss the visit, provide information and guidance, as well as screen the student. Once all the registrations are reviewed, the list will be finalized.

10. Where do we send the release of liability form?

The release of liability form should be printed, signed by the student and both parents, scanned as a PDF file, and submitted online at the time of registration. Without **all** the above signatures, the application is deemed incomplete and will not be processed. Only the PDF format can be uploaded.

11. Are there any specific immigration rules to follow?

It is the individual's parent/guardian's responsibility to ensure that their child carries valid travel documents to enter India as well as for the return to the USA.

For a smooth immigration process at Indian airports, all participants are strongly encouraged to have an OCI (Overseas Citizenship of India) card before departure for India. OCI can take up to 3-4 months processing time, so if you do not have it already, apply now.

12. What are the boarding arrangements for the boys and girls?

Girls and boys will be roomed separately. During the stay, mingling of boys and girls is expected to be conservative, according to the rural Indian norms. The students must follow these instructions and any other instructions given by the chaperones.

13. Will my child, as well as other youth participants, be under the supervision of responsible adult(s) at all times?

Yes. Trained program managers will be arranging the day programs for the children, and chaperones will accompany the children during the activities of the service visit.

14. Will somebody from the USA accompany my child to India and back?

Since there are children participating from various places in North America, this will depend on where the chaperons are from. All efforts will be made to facilitate group travel to India; however, it is the individual student's responsibility to travel to India and back.

15. When will the parent chaperones accompany my child during the travel in India?

A suitable location and time will be chosen as a "muster point" in India where all the students and chaperones must gather at the beginning of the trip and travel as a group to the CORD center. Similarly, a suitable time and muster location will be chosen for the end of the trip, and students as well as chaperones travel back from the CORD center as a group to this location by the predetermined time. Chaperones' responsibility to accompany the students starts at the muster location, at the muster time for the beginning of the trip, and ends at the muster location and muster time at the conclusion of the trip. Students and parents must make their own arrangements to bring the children to the muster location by the pre-specified muster time at the beginning of the trip and to pick them up at the end of the trip at the muster location and by the muster time. Chaperones are not responsible for the children before the muster time and muster location at the beginning of the trip or after the muster time and location at the end of the trip. We recommend that you do not book your international tickets until the muster times and sites have been communicated to you by CORD USA.

16. What are the locations and dates of the service visit Winter 2026?

The service visit scheduled for Winter 2026, is from Monday, December 21st, 2026 through Saturday January 2nd, 2027 to CORD Deuladiha, Odisha, India.

Muster date to travel to CORD Center: Monday, December 21st, 2026 at Bhubaneswar airport.

Return Date to muster point: Saturday January 2nd, 2027 at Bhubaneswar airport.

December 21st, 2026, Monday is the muster date by 10 AM at Bhubaneswar airport (BBI). Exact time will be determined later. From Bhubaneswar airport, CORD Deuladiha is a 4.5 hour road trip. Last day of activities: Saturday, January 2nd, 2027 at Bhubaneswar airport. Exact timings to be determined later.

Upon arrival at Bhubaneswar airport on January 2nd 2027, the responsibility of the chaperones will end. Parents need to arrange for the students to be picked up at the airport immediately upon arrival. As the chaperones also have onward travel arrangements made, they cannot wait at the airport watching the students.

17. Are there similar programs in other CORD centers in India?

There have been similar programs at other CORD centers in the past. Plans are afoot to introduce these projects in future to other CORD centers as well.

18. Are there new requirements to protect against COVID?

All participants are required to be vaccinated. There are no new requirements. We will monitor the situation and follow the CORD center protocol, as and when need arises.

19. What kinds of facilities are available in the student accommodations?

The accommodations are clean, comfortable and safe. Western toilets may be available. The food provided is prepared with a lot of care, is vegetarian and healthy. Bottled or purified drinking water is provided to the students. During field visits, lunch is prepared at the center in the morning and is sent to the field.

20. What if my child gets sick during the visit?

As the service visit locations are remote villages, only the most basic primary health care can be provided during the visit. A local guardian needs to be available in India who is willing and able to pick up the child in case of any illness, which is beyond the capacity of the service center to handle. Chaperones and service center can only handle very minor illnesses. We would ask the students and chaperones to refrain from buying and consuming food and drinks outside the CORD facility in order to reduce the chances of getting sick.

21. Why is the assignment of a local guardian in India necessary?

In the event of serious injury or illness or an emergency, parents may not be available to pick up the child from the center within a few hours. In such a situation, chaperones or the center will have to call the local guardian in India to come quickly to receive the child for proper medical care. Chaperones cannot be appointed as guardian as they have to be with the rest of the group to continue service visit activities.

22. Can I or other family members visit my child during the service visit?

Visitors – friends and family – can visit the student at the CORD centers on a designated date-time (to be communicated later). No parent or visitor will be allowed to stay with the student. Only those who are selected as chaperones can stay with the students during the service visit.