

Dear SERVE Traveler,

We are so glad you have decided to travel across the border for a SERVE trip this summer. We are excited for how God is already working in these places and how he will continue to work through you and your group this summer!

Since you are crossing the Canada/US border to reach your SERVE Site, we want to share with you some best practices we have learned over the years in order to make sure you are prepared and confident at the border. While for some of your leaders crossing the border may be old news, this may be a brand-new experience for many of your students, so make sure you prepare them well.

We have compiled information from both official government websites as well as from some of our experienced SERVE travelers to share with you. Information regarding crossing the border can be found here: travel.gc.ca/destinations/united-states and www.cbsa-asfc.gc.ca/travel-voyage/td-dv-eng.html and <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/International-Travel-Country-Information-Pages/Canada.html>

Concerning Necessary Documents

For entering the US from Canada:

- If travelling by air, everyone must present a valid passport or NEXUS card that is valid for the duration of your stay.
- For those 16 and older:
 - If travelling by land, you must present a valid passport, a Trusted Traveler Program card, or an enhanced driver's license (EDL) or enhanced identification card (EIC) from a province or territory where there's a US approved program. Your identification must be valid for the duration of your stay. A NEXUS card can be used to cross, but everyone in the vehicle must have NEXUS cards to do so.
- For those 15 and under:
 - If travelling by land, they must have one of the following documents:
 - A passport
 - An original or a copy of a birth certificate
 - An original Canadian citizenship certificate
- Canadian citizens aged 18 and under travelling with an organized group must have written parental/guardian consent.

For entering Canada from the US:

- If travelling by air, everyone must present a valid passport or NEXUS card that is valid for the duration of your stay.

For entering Canada from the US (continued):

- For those 16 and older:
 - If travelling by land, you must present a valid passport, a Trusted Traveler Program card, or an enhanced driver's license (EDL) with a flag icon (NOT just a star). Your identification must be valid for the duration of your stay. A NEXUS card can be used to cross, but everyone in the vehicle must have NEXUS cards to do so.
- For those 15 and under:
 - If travelling by land, they must have one of the following documents:
 - A passport
 - An original or a copy of a birth certificate
- US citizens aged 18 and under travelling with an organized group must have written parental/guardian consent or a signed and notarized Consent to Travel Form.

Proof of vaccination for COVID-19 is not required anymore to cross the border

What our Experienced Leaders Say:

- Things are a lot easier if everyone opts for the passport option instead of the NEXUS card or EDL. Ensure that the passports are valid (to the travel date).
- Have both parents sign the consent to travel forms, print them on your church letterhead, and get them notarized. All of these make them seem more legitimate and will be accepted faster. (There is an example Consent to Travel Form in our Resource Box at thereforego.com/serve-resources)
- It seems to be appreciated if you are very organized with your paperwork including organizing the passports in order of seating from front to back.
- Keep backup copies of everything in multiple places.
- Know what's expected of you and the youth you're bringing across in terms of documentation from official government websites. Print off these sections, along with the URL they came from, and meet or exceed these expectations. Have this sheet with you, so you can show the border agent if they say something different.

Other Documents and Information You Need

- The address and name of the church you will be going to. Also, having the contact information of the Host Team Coordinator at the Site may come in handy. The Host church will be sending you a letter of invitation and you'll want to bring a copy of that.
- Keep one of your leader's Spiritual Life Guides to show the things you will be doing if asked detailed questions.
- You may even want to print a basic itinerary on your church letterhead.

The Language to Use and Why: For a long time, both Canada and the US have been protective of their jobs. The word “work” is a trigger for border agents to ask a lot more questions. Their main concern is that you’re entering the country to work for pay. To avoid unnecessary questions at the border, avoid using the words “work” or “do volunteer work”. Instead, you can use words like you are “going on a mission trip” or “volunteering with a non-profit” or that you are going to “worship and fellowship with a Christian community”. Using the right language will avoid more questions or longer conversations with the border agent.

Coach your students! Make sure your students know how important this is so there is no chance they would say “work” by accident or as a joke. It is a good idea to even coach them that they should not talk at all at the border unless spoken to. Sometimes border agents will only talk to leaders and sometimes they will talk to everyone in the vehicle, but it would be better if the kids only answer questions they are directly asked.

Your Attitude: Make sure you are in a good, cooperative mood when talking to border agents. Kindness can go a long way. Try your best to look responsible and organized. It is also a good idea to ask all the students to take off hats and sunglasses, put away phones and headphones, and show respect to the agents.

Pray: We know there are so many things out of our control. We also know prayer is powerful. It is important that you cover your trip in prayer as well as asking parents and church members at home to pray for you as you travel. If you are creating a prayer guide for your congregation to follow during your trip, we encourage you to ask your congregations to pray during the specific window of time you anticipate crossing the border. We hope this will be a great way to make your whole congregation feel like they have a part in the SERVE experience!

The biggest thing we want you to know is that it is best to be well prepared. We have had SERVE groups crossing the border for years and have heard of very few problems. We remain confident that borders will be crossed smoothly and life-changing ministry will happen this summer as students and churches spread out and serve communities for the glory of God!

If you have any concern around your journey we are always here to help! We are happy to answer whatever questions you have about any part of SERVE. You can contact our office at 616.241.5616 x3038 or by email at serve@thereforego.com.

The ThereforeGo Ministries Team