MCC SALT/YAMEN Service Opportunity

Assignment Title & Partner Organization: SALT/YAMEN: Communications Assistant – MCC Colombia-Ecuador

Term: August 11, 2020 – July 17, 2021
FTE: 1.0
Location: Cali, Colombia
Date Required: August 11, 2020

Program information and policies can be found at mcc.org/salt or mcc.org/yamen

*MCC is an equal opportunity employer, committed to employment equity. MCC values diversity and invites all qualified candidates to apply.*

Synopsis:

The SALT/YAMENer will help produce and manage communication content for MCC Colombia-Ecuador, including their supported projects and other efforts relevant to MCC Colombia-Ecuador's program and partner organizations. They will assist in the development of multi-media storytelling (still photography, video & written) and other communication pieces. The participant may also assist partner organizations with communications projects, capacity building according to the needs of the partners, or may get involved in other community-level involvements, according to the participant’s skills and interests.

Qualifications:

*All MCC workers are expected to exhibit a commitment to a personal Christian faith and discipleship; active church membership; and nonviolent peacemaking.*

*An invitation to an assignment is contingent on the successful completion of a criminal background check.*

- Bachelor’s or associate degree or equivalent, preferably in Communications, Journalism, Graphic Design, Multimedia, or Public Relations.
- Professional or educational experience in photography & photo editing, (digital) communications/media, journalism, graphic design, social media; experience with online photo management systems an asset.
- Computer proficiency with Microsoft Office, digital design platforms, and social media.
- Creative, innovative and resourceful, with an interest in working with local partners.
- Excellent written and verbal communications skills in English.
- Spanish fluency an asset, but not required. Willingness to learn Spanish is required.
- Strong organizational skills; ability to function in non-structured setting with effective time management skills. Self-initiative is important.
- Candidates invited to interview for this position will be asked to provide a portfolio of their work.

Assignment Narrative:
Colombia has suffered greatly as a result of a long internal armed and social conflict. In response, the Colombian Anabaptist churches and institutions have been working to transform the realities of injustice and violence for seeds of hope, justice and lasting peace through different sectors of society at a local, regional and national level. For this reason, MCC Colombia-Ecuador works very closely with these Anabaptist churches supporting their peace efforts. In spite of the fact that the majority of MCC’s work in Colombia has focused on institutional projects, MCC understands that the transformation of society needs to occur at all levels. It is for this reason that MCC Colombia works through programs like SALT/YAMEN to broaden its relationships and participation with local churches and communities.

The Mennonite Brethren Church has been in Cali and Valle de Cauca for more than 70 years and have more than 20 congregations in this region. The region faces challenges of urban violence as well as armed conflict. Edupaz (Foundation for Peace Education and Conflict Resolution) is a peace office located in Cali which accompanies organizational process of the Mennonite Brethren.

With programs, projects and personnel spread out over the country, the SALT/YAMENer will assist with enhancing the internal and external communications of MCC Colombia-Ecuador. S/he will assist in developing and implementing a communications strategy to increase internal team communications, develop a platform for sharing of information and stories between MCC partners, and help MCC Colombia-Ecuador produce communications content for MCC's social and mainstream media as requested. S/he will support the MCC Colombia-Ecuador program by developing content, including photographs/videos, that communicate to both a Colombian and international audience the realities of the local context and the challenges and solutions present in communities, partner organizations, and other efforts relevant to MCC Colombia-Ecuador's program. Note that any information meant to be shared with the larger MCC constituency is done under the supervision of the MCC Representative(s)and in coordination with the MCC Canada Communications and Donor Relations departments.

The SALT/YAMENer will support MCC Colombia-Ecuador team communications through producing a monthly team newsletter and the elaboration of regular content for MCC digital platforms (MCC LACA blog, Instagram, etc.).

In addition to direct support of MCC Colombia-Ecuador communications, this individual may support local partner organizations with communication projects and content (e.g. multi-media storytelling, graphic design, social media) or help build the capacity of MCC partners in documentation and communications projects (e.g. feature writing, video/photojournalism, or social media support).

The SALT/YAMENer will work full-time from the MCC office in Cali and will be supervised by the MCC Connecting Peoples Coordinator, who resides in Cali along with two other MCC staff. The SALT/YAMENer will attend scheduled staff meetings and all-staff retreats.

Learning Spanish is required in order to communicate well with others. Spanish language classes will be provided, if required.

SALT/YAMEN assignments in Colombia place a priority on building relationships, participation in the life of a local church, and community involvement. It is MCC Colombia’s goal that the SALT/YAMEN program will result in a stronger commitment to the world-wide church family, both for the congregations and families that send the young people and for the churches and families
that host them in Colombia. Through living with host families and participating in host churches and service assignments, participants will:

- Realistically test their gifts, limitations, and their call for further training and longer-term cross-cultural service.
- Grow spiritually as their faith is challenged and nurtured in a cross-cultural setting.
- Broaden their understanding and appreciation of the lives of their brothers and sisters in their host country and further mutual trust, relationships, and caring.
- Help to dismantle the stereotypes and prejudices that exist between cultures both during the exchange year and upon their return to their home communities.

Duties:

- Ensure that any information meant to be shared with the larger MCC constituency is done under the supervision of the MCC Representative(s) and in coordination with the MCC Canada Communications and Donor Relations (CDR) department.
- Provide support and creative input on developing and implementing MCC Colombia-Ecuador communications strategy with the MCC Colombia-Ecuador team and fulfilling content requests from other MCC offices.
- Assist with the production of MCC Colombia-Ecuador internal and external newsletters.
- Assist in documentation of stories and with photography and/or videography by participating in partner visits with MCC staff.
- Develop articles/blog content and social media content about partners, projects and participants for MCC Colombia-Ecuador related work in cooperation with the MCC Canada CDR department.
- Identify creative communications strategies and projects for communicating about MCC’s work in Colombia/Ecuador mainly to partners and other local stakeholders, as appropriate.
- Follow MCC brand guides and policies as per MCC Communications department.
- Manage uploading and maintenance of MCC Colombia-Ecuador photographs onto MCC’s online photo database (Mediaspace).
- As time permits, work together with partner organizations to identify and implement priority communications projects, depending on the partner organization this may be graphic design, website design, photography, written content, or other communications material; or assist with communications-related capacity building trainings for MCC Colombia-Ecuador partner organizations.
- As time permits, volunteer at an MCC local partner according to partner needs and participants interests/skills.
- Participate in MCC Colombia-Ecuador team meetings (2-3 per year) and staff events.
- Participate actively at local Mennonite congregation.

Location Description:

The SALT/YAMENer will be located in Cali, the industrial capital of Colombia. Cali is a large city in the Pacific region of Colombia with a dynamic culture. It offers many modern conveniences including markets with local fare, modern shopping centers with access to imported goods, good health facilities, various educational opportunities, cultural events, international restaurants, museums and parks. Upper class communities and commercial centers coexist alongside marginalized communities and limited infrastructure. The violence/insecurity, gangs, lots of traffic and air pollution are growing problems.
Colombia has two seasons: dry (summer) and wet (winter). The dry or "hot" seasons normally occur December-January & July-August. The rainy or "wet" seasons normally take place from April-May & October-November. Cali’s climate tends to vary between temperate and hot with temperatures between 16°C (61°F) to 30°C (86°F). During the "summer" season, it can get quite hot and humid even when it rains.

The SALT/YAMENer will live with a local family connected with an Anabaptist church. Homes in the city are generally made of cement block structures and either tile or cement floors with tin or cement rooftops. Iron grates cover the doors and some windows, and nearly all urban homes have walls and gates. Electricity is generally dependable but can cut out on occasion, especially during thunderstorms. The SALT/YAMENer will most likely attend their host family’s church on a regular basis.

There is a small MCC office in Cali with the majority of administration staff, including the country representatives, working out of the Bogota office. Although Cali is a city with a long history of violence, the Cali MCC office is located in a relatively safe part of the city, but it is still necessary to be mindful about personal security when out in public.

Cali has a modern airport and easy access to public transportation which is available through a fairly organized city bus system. Buses can be overcrowded at certain times of day but very reasonable in cost. Taxis are in abundance and readily available also. Cali, along with Bogota, are transportation hubs for the region and offer a variety of cross-country bus transport options.

There is generally cell phone access in the area, enabling regular contact with MCC staff, partners, and loved ones back home. Most MCCers use WhatsApp for communication and texting, including communicating internationally. Both MCC offices have WiFi, which is also available in some business/restaurant establishments and is typically reliable.

Colombia has suffered greatly from a protracted internal armed and social conflict inflamed by U.S. military assistance and foreign economic interests. Anabaptist Colombian churches have responded with a wide variety of local church ministries and institutional efforts that seek to transform realities of injustice and violence in the Colombian context. MCC Colombia-Ecuador directly supports more than 20 churches and six local Anabaptist NGOs in their peacebuilding efforts. Peacebuilding is the focus MCC Colombia-Ecuador programs which is done through areas such as education, community development, advocacy/justice, and agriculture, amongst others.

The MCC Colombia team is made up of 12-15 international and national staff plus six Seed service workers (a two-year program) and 4-6 SALT/YAMEN service workers (one-year program). The SALT/YAMENer would join the MCC Colombia team for 2-3 meeting retreats per year.

**Challenges:**

- Living in Colombia involves some risks due to unstable conditions resulting from armed conflict. In the case of large cities in Colombia, the level of risk is comparable to other large cities in the world. Rarely are large cities affected by armed conflict, although there may be risks related to travel outside of towns mentioned in other locations. This doesn't mean that participants cannot travel outside of their service locations; it just means that they have to take care in following security guidelines and ask for advice from local churches and communities.
• Cali is a relatively unsafe city with a high risk of theft and muggings and it is not recommended to travel at night except in authorized taxis. The MCC participants depend on their partners and communities who know the situation well in order to make decisions about when and where to travel. The participants should be willing to accept the decisions of the community in terms of security procedures. All of the locations mentioned above are being carefully consulted in this process, and MCC will not locate participants in a location that does not offer adequate security conditions.

• Adapting to living with people from a different culture, integrating into the local community, and adopting its customs and patterns.

• Participants will also have to confront the reality of being in the presence of people with very profound needs. This can be very emotionally exhausting at times. The community leaders and also the members of the MCC team will serve as support to confront these dilemmas and emotions that may emerge under these circumstances.

• Local area not supportive to LGBTQ+ persons: perceptions of LGBTQ+ individuals are generally negative, and more strongly so in Christian communities. An openly LGBTQ+ Christian would face significant challenges with acceptance in this context.

• Managing frustration when things don’t turn out as expected can be hard. While we do our best to determine and outline job responsibilities with our local partners, assignments really come alive based on the passions, skills, and gifts of an individual. Responsibilities may change or be refined over time in communication with supervisors to meet the ongoing changes and needs within a local context. As such, the greatest characteristics a participant can bring to an assignment are adaptability, flexibility, patience, a willingness to get your hands dirty, and humility to complete even mundane tasks.

• For those who are very task-oriented, it can be a challenge to recognize the importance of "being" instead of always "doing" as building healthy relationships and mutually transformative learning is an important part of the participant experience. We hope participants will come with a desire to walk alongside our local partners, rather than see the assignment solely as a way to "get things done".