

Frequently Answered Questions

1) Who are the intended beneficiaries of the AERO Fund?

The target group for the Atitlan Education Resource for Opportunity, or AERO Fund, are intelligent, ambitious, and responsible young citizens of Santiago Atitlan and the surrounding towns who have a specific post-high school (“preparatorio”) program in mind for which they are qualified which would lead to their personal advancement as well as to raise the living standards of the community as a whole, but who lack the financial wherewithal to achieve that educational goal. Any reasonable academic or technological program would be considered, including, but not limited to school teaching, plumbing, electrical, computer, business, or health fields.

2) Where is Santiago Atitlan, and why does it deserve a special fund?

Santiago Atitlan is a predominately Indigenous Tz’utujil Mayan village of nearly 45,000 people located in the Highlands of Guatemala, on the shore of Lake Atitlan. The community lacks a clean culinary water supply, sewer system and treatment, and garbage pickup, and is woefully deficient in all aspects of health care. The only inpatient facility in the town is a tiny “hospitalito” located in a 4 bed rental house staffed primarily by volunteer medical personnel from the United States, along with a few Indigenous doctors. Until the recent end of the period of repression and military occupation of the Guatemalan Highland communities, there were no public schools functioning, leading to generations of illiterate citizens who mostly cannot speak Spanish or even sign their names. It is our very strong belief that the future of Santiago Atitlan rests in the education of its young people, who will become the community leaders of the future, and will be in a position to demand and expect at least the basic amenities of a modern society. And education in Guatemala is so very cheap by our standards, but totally out of reach of most Santiaguans. That’s why we want to support them!

3) How are the recipients selected and by whom?

A selection advisory committee, or “comite,” has been established in Santiago Atitlan, Guatemala, consisting of three prominent citizens of Santiago who know well the needs and deficiencies of their community and who are selflessly and without financial compensation committed to helping to raise living standards there. These three are well networked in the community so that they are able to access appropriate candidates, verify applicants’ information and provide appropriate supervision and follow-up. All three are upstanding citizens who are well respected and respectful of each other, otherwise unaffiliated except by their commitment to their community, and by their shared belief that the future success of Santiago rests in the hands of its young people. Dr. John and Rita were highly impressed by all three of these fine people during the Nelsons’ tenure of volunteering in Santiago.

This selection advisory “comite” functions to spread the word in Santiago regarding the availability of the scholarships and then interviews applicants, making their selection according to AERO Fund guidelines.

After there is unanimous approval of selected candidates by this “comite,” the documentation is faxed to the Governing Board of the Fund in Utah for final approval. The Utah Governing Board of the Fund is made up of not fewer than three members, the majority of whom are members of the Board of Trustees of The Hope Alliance.

4) What are the criteria the selection committee uses to choose the recipient?

Criteria must be considered objectively and must address the candidate’s commitment to the program of choice, practicality, and financial need of applicant. Also, how the applicant’s specific trade or profession will benefit the community of Santiago Atitlan as a whole is very important. The applicant is expected to declare a commitment to working in Santiago Atitlan for at least a few years after completing their education. The selection committee utilizes a form based on Committee Advisory Guidelines, approved by the Governing Board of the Fund, to facilitate their selection process, which is ultimately to be submitted back to the Governing Board for its approval.

5) What fraction of the funds will go directly for student support?

The fund is set up as an “endowment” for education scholarships in Santiago Atitlan. Donations to the fund are added to the corpus or principal of the Fund. The corpus is invested and the income or the net appreciation of the fund is used to fund the scholarships each year. As donations increase the corpus, the fund will be able to support more scholarships. The number of young people who can be assisted each year depends, of course, on investment income, which is under the influence of the economic trends of the stock market, as well as the amount of ongoing commitment to previous scholarship awardees.

6) What is the overhead?

Zero. The corpus and net appreciation (realized and unrealized), may not be used or made available for use for general operating of fund-raising expenses or capital expenditures of The Hope Alliance, even where related to the Fund.

All legal, administrative, investment and logistic labors have been provided without charge to AERO by Hope Alliance and volunteers committed to the goals and success of the fund. At the present time, and for the foreseeable future, the “overhead” of the fund will remain at zero.

7) What are the recipient’s responsibilities in use of the funds?

The recipient is to use the scholarship or special assistance to pay for, or be reimbursed for, educational essentials such as tuition, books, school supplies, travel to school, room and board, incidentals, and similar expenses; or other such matters necessary or appropriate to enable the individual to obtain appropriate training or education. In order to avoid abuse, the funds will usually be distributed directly to the institution or program in which the student will be a participant, rather than to the students themselves.

8) How is the student monitored for progress in his/her education and use of funds?

To the extent feasible, payments of the scholarship or special assistance should be made by The Hope Alliance directly to the educational institution or other provider of goods or services. When not possible, payments may be made directly to the recipients of benefits under policies and procedures adopted by the Governing Board of the Fund to provide a reasonable level of verification of proper use of the funds.

The progress of the student in his/her education program and the verification of appropriate use of the funds will be monitored and compiled by the selection “comite” in Guatemala, and continuing financial support will depend on satisfactory participation, accomplishment, and advancement within the selected program. Reports will be submitted by the Santiago “comite” at regular intervals determined by the makeup of the educational program, to the Governing Board of the Fund to follow the progress of the fund beneficiary. Once the recipient has been selected, the AERO Fund Governing Board will be committed to following through with support of that person through the completion of his/her program, even if that means limiting additional recipients of AERO scholarships, provided the student follows through with the requirements the program in a timely fashion.

9) Is my donation to the AERO fund tax deductible?

The Atitlan Education Resource for Opportunity Fund is a service of The Hope Alliance. The Hope Alliance is a public charity described in the Internal Revenue Code Section 501(c)(3), not a private foundation under Code Section 509(a). Donations are tax deductible for federal income tax purposes to the limits under the tax law, which for donations to a public charity are typically up to 50% of the donor's donation base. Each donor will want to consult with his or her own tax advisor as to the deductions particularly because there are a number of twists and turns to the tax rules affected by individual situations.