The program outlined in this document is subject to change according to practical realities within Peru as well as the particular interests of participants. This flexibility allows the Bridge Year cohort to move at its own pace, to be responsive to personal and group interests, and to take advantage of the learning opportunities that result from unexpected events.
Bridge Year Program in Peru

in partnership with ProWorld

Volunteers in Peru are based in the town of Urubamba. Situated next to the Urubamba River in the heart of the Sacred Valley, this peaceful and intriguing town is located an hour from Cusco at an altitude of 9,419 feet above sea level. It rests below the spectacular Chicon glacier and is surrounded by farmland, historic ruins, and snowcapped Andean peaks. With a population of nearly 18,000, Urubamba is the largest town in the Sacred Valley and serves as a central point and major market amongst the surrounding communities.

Arrival and Orientation

After a brief layover in Lima, participants fly into Cusco, the archaeological capital of the Americas and the oldest continuously inhabited city in South America. A brief period of rest and acclimatization is followed by a comprehensive two-week orientation.

Participants get to know local staff and community partners, learn about possible service assignments, discuss health and safety issues, review program logistics and the calendar, prepare for the homestay experience, and begin Spanish classes. Participants are also introduced to development issues in the Peruvian context and learn more about Peruvian culture and history, including Incan and pre-Incan societies.

Orientation begins in Cusco and then moves to Urubamba. In Cusco, participants stay together in group lodging. Upon arrival in Urubamba, participants move in with host families, settling into their new homes.
Homestay

Volunteers spend the majority of the Bridge Year Program living with a carefully selected homestay family. These families provide warm, safe homes along with insight into Peruvian daily life. With the homestay family, participants not only have their basic material needs met but they have the opportunity to form genuine and meaningful relationships. The bonds created with Peruvian families often prove to be one of the most memorable aspects of the experience.

Bridge Year volunteers share meals, living space and experiences with their Peruvian family. Participants get a key to the house along with their own room, which includes a bed, desk, and wardrobe or dresser for clothes.

Language Instruction

Communication plays an essential role in ensuring a rewarding and successful program. Whether participants are relating to their homestay family, working on their service project, or simply making friends with local Peruvians, Spanish language skills are critical to success. For this reason, Spanish classes play a prominent role in participants’ weekly schedules.

Spanish classes are taught at a local language school and focus on conversational fluency. Students are placed into classes based on their level of proficiency. The number of classroom hours starts high and gradually diminishes throughout the year as students become more proficient.
Program House

Bridge Year participants have open access to the Casa ProPeru—the program house—and its volunteer lounge, kitchen, library, and patio. Volunteers are welcome to come in to meet with staff or other volunteers or just to hang out.

Purified drinking water, tea, coffee and fresh fruit are always available to help participants stay balanced and healthy. The program house library offers resources to help with language study, along with some general information about Peru and a variety of novels and books for leisure reading. There are a few computers available to volunteers to facilitate project work and wifi is available to those who choose to bring their personal laptop computers.

Service Placement

Service work is divided into two main areas: support of ongoing ProWorld Peru projects, and designing and implementing small-scale community development projects within partner communities outside of Urubamba.

Support of Ongoing ProWorld Peru Projects
Below are descriptions of the small-scale development initiatives that ProWorld Peru manages on an ongoing basis. Participants will support at least one on-going ProWorld-Peru project for the full duration of the program. This list is not comprehensive; it simply provides examples of the types of service projects in which volunteers might be placed.

Cleaner Burning Stoves – Since 2003, ProWorld has collaborated with local communities in rural areas around Urubamba to construct and install cleaner burning stoves. The function of these stoves is to reduce the amount of firewood used by each family and to decrease harmful indoor smoke inhaled by family members while cooking. Volunteer activities may include working with local families to install stoves, developing educational materials to better illustrate how the stoves function,
administering health surveys to monitor the impact of the stoves, or visiting communities to conduct follow-up to ensure that stoves are functioning properly.

**Water Filters** – As ProWorld’s central public health project, this effort involves building and installing ceramic water filters with local families around the Sacred Valley. The main function of these filters is to disinfect contaminated water and make it safe for human consumption. ProWorld’s office in Urubamba serves as a filter workshop where the filters are fabricated and distributed. Volunteer responsibilities may include filter production and installation, conducting community education and follow-up visits to ensure proper use and maintenance of the filters, and delivering public health education workshops on topics such as clean drinking water, safe water storage, prevention of parasites, and healthy practices such as hand washing.

**Healthy Homes** – ProWorld’s “*Viviendas Saludables*” or “Healthy Homes” project seeks to transform disorderly and unhygienic conditions that lead to stomach, respiratory and skin diseases in rural homes by encouraging families to adopt healthy living habits that diminish risks, improving access to nutritious, locally available foods, and strengthening production opportunities and family income. Volunteer opportunities may include aiding in the construction of guinea pig cages, ecological refrigerators, cupboards, and stone patios; offering training to the families on nutrition, hygiene, and composting; organizing health campaigns; and project monitoring and evaluation.

**Health Schools** – ProWorld’s “*Escuelas Saludables*” or “Healthy Schools” project is a new initiative that was launched in 2013 in a local Urubamban school. Education and social-based outcomes are addressed through a holistic approach geared towards improving student experiences. Volunteer opportunities include: English language instruction, assisting teachers with sports and arts enrichment activities, nutrition and hygiene classes, as well as literacy capacity building. Other volunteer opportunities include garden design and construction, improvement of the physical facilities of the school, and excursions with students.
Women’s Artisanal Groups – ProWorld Peru has helped form two women’s artisanal groups with the goal of empowering women to improve their economic and social conditions. Each group is made up of rural Peruvian women who are trained in various artisanal skills such as jewelry-making and knitting and empowered to sell their goods to tourist groups and local hotels to increase their income and improve family living conditions. Group meetings also serve as a healthy social outlet for group members, offering a chance to socialize with others while learning new skills and developing stronger self-esteem and tighter-knit communities. Volunteer responsibilities may include teaching artisanal skills; leading activities that strengthen group dynamics and self-esteem; leading workshops that complement artisanal training such as English lessons and basic business concepts; identifying and securing local markets and helping to develop promotional materials; and, above all, building meaningful relationships with hard-working, joyful, welcoming Peruvian women.

Throughout the year participants check in regularly with local staff to set goals and monitor the progress of project work.

Small-Scale Community Development Projects

In addition to supporting ProWorld Peru’s ongoing projects, Bridge Year volunteers work in partner communities outside of Urubamba to diagnose, design and implement unique small-scale community development projects. This process begins with a thorough needs assessment or diagnostic with the goal of understanding the nuances of each community and building relationships with local leaders. Based on the diagnostic, program participants design and implement relevant small-scale projects in collaboration with ProWorld Peru staff and community leaders. Through this process, Bridge Year students are exposed to the various stages of grassroots project development and management.

Some examples of small-scale projects that have been executed by past Bridge Year students include: English classes for youth and adults, after school youth
groups, the construction of public bathrooms at a community soccer field, and the building of a small community park and volleyball court for women and children.

Cultural Enrichment Activities

Volunteers participate in frequent cultural activities, excursions, and adventures designed to provide greater insight into Peruvian culture, history and geography. Bridge Year participants engage in a wide array of activities including hikes around the Sacred Valley, visits to nearby archeological sites, and trips to local markets and festivals of interest. On-site staff also organizes roundtable discussions with local experts who talk about a variety of topics, from local development initiatives to creating a greater global consciousness.

A number of excursions are organized over the course of the program, including a visit to the stunning archaeological site of Machu Picchu, a trip to Lake Titicaca—the world’s highest navigable lake and home to many colorful indigenous groups—and a visit to the museums and other notable sites of Peru’s cosmopolitan capital city of Lima. The program also includes short trips to the beautiful northern coast, the Amazonian jungle, and the colonial city of Arequipa.

Program Wrap Up

Bridge Year participants wrap up their program with a four-day debrief conference at a tranquil location away from Urubamba. Providing a nice buffer between the intensity of leaving Urubamba and the pending transition back to life at home, this conference guides volunteers in identifying, examining, and assimilating the lessons learned from their experience. Participants also reflect on their return home, their goals for the future, and the ways in which they can best integrate their experience into their daily life at Princeton.