

MISSION TRIP

THE TOP

10  
*ten*

BEST PRACTICES

Short-Term Missions Trips, especially during the summer, are a popular way for churches to get their congregations involved in missions and outreach projects without requiring a long-term commitment.

Teams commit to a couple of weeks to serve at home or abroad in a variety of ways ranging from construction projects to Vacation Bible Schools to pastors' conferences to medical camps. Short-Term Mission Trips might involve individuals going overseas for a few months, or larger group teams that serve for a shorter amount of time right in their own backyard. Teams often embark on these trips with honorable intentions, seeking to better the church in the developing nations of the Global South. They seek partnerships, relationships with international believers, and ultimately the growth of the Church at home and around the world.

How do we [ensure these Summer Missions Trips are as successful](#) and effective as they can be for both the people being served and the people doing the serving? Here are Ten Best Practices to help you make your Summer Missions Trip the best it can be.

## But First...

Before reading the Ten Best Practices or considering any missions trip, a church and its leadership must clarify its theology of short-term mission.

- What does the church believe about its calling to missions?
- What does the church see as the result of missions at home and around the world?
- What is its strategy for discipling the nations? How can individuals participate in this strategy?
- How much is the [church willing to financially back](#) these strategies and fund objectives that will help the church reach its missiological goals?

These are weighty questions worth serious consideration and debate by pastors and elders alike. Principles, policies, and paradigms for the church's theology of missions should be both recorded and communicated clearly to the congregation on a regular basis. Anyone who has a question must be heard and a response given. If the church is able, it should hire and appoint a staff member to own the missions strategy. A missions committee can also help with this important work. Clarity is essential before planning any missions trip. Start there and everything else will flow freely from that careful process.

*Ten*

**BEST PRACTICES  
FOR SUMMER  
MISSIONS TRIPS**





# Choose the Best Ministry to Serve

Summer Missions Trips are catalysts to  
creating long-term partnerships with  
ministries at home and abroad.

Thus, it is important to choose a ministry to serve that is a good match for your church in theology, in size, in ethos, and in financial stability. A mismatch in any of these areas can cause challenges that may prevent ultimate effectiveness, while at the same time wasting money and mental and emotional energy as the partnership develops.

One of the best ways to determine ministry match is to send a Vision Team ahead of the Summer Missions Trip. This lead team can learn about the proposed ministry and the culture in which it exists, discover the best way a team can serve, [configure logistics](#) (hotels, local transportation, food, estimate overall costs, and give an effective vetting of the entire situation to ensure the best stewardship of the upcoming trip. This Vision Team can make its visit 12-18 months ahead of time, well in advance of the proposed trip. This long lead time gives church leadership enough time to make the best decision on moving forward in partnering with that particular ministry in that particular location. If things don't work out as expected, there is time to choose something more appropriate.

After choosing the best ministry with which to partner, and while still on the field during the Summer Missions Trip, tentative plans for future trips can be made, and proposed ways to move the partnership forward can be recommended. Planning together with partner ministry leaders builds trust and ownership. Once the Summer Missions Trip is complete, the church leadership can do a post-trip evaluation of the partner ministry to confirm that it is the best relationship to take forward into the future.



# Choose the Best Trip Participants

Creating a Summer Missions Trip Team is an important and challenging task that takes pastoral skill and divine guidance.

Church leaders must depend on the leading of the Lord as they choose the best team members for any Summer Missions Trip Team based on [applicants' personal testimony](#), their ministry understanding, travel experience, ability to get along with others, and general resilience. How to find the best people to populate the team most effectively?

## **Here are a few tips.**

### **Advertise up to a year in advance.**

In today's overscheduled society, people need a lot of time to add something major into their calendars. This is especially true if the Trip requires professionals like doctors, engineers, teachers, or pastors who need to schedule time off well in advance and in coordination with a team of others. Choose the trip dates and begin your advertising even before all logistics and details are finalized to help reserve dates and get the trip on people's schedules. Be sure to [post the information online](#) and make the link easily and readily available to anyone who might want to find it. Do your best to announce the trip in main worship services as well.

### **Hold information meetings.**

People will crave information about the trip and will have many questions they need answered before they are able to commit to a major trip. The best way to communicate to the most people at once is to hold information meetings. Schedule several meetings during common times when most people can attend. Sundays after church or between services are a ordinarily available time. Offer details on dates, logistics, costs and funding deadlines, ministry areas, health and hygiene, tourism, culture, and contingencies. Give potential participants as much information as possible to help them make the best decision they can make about joining the team. Be sure to create handouts with the pertinent information that people can take with them, as well as a link to online information.



## Take applications and Non-refundable deposits.

[Create a trip participant application](#) that not only collects demographic information, but also helps team leadership get to know the applicant, their stage in life, their ministry experience, their overseas or other missions trip experience, and their overall suitability to serve on the particular team. Some key information to collect on the application form includes:

- Name, address, phone number, email, date of birth, citizenship
- General medical information, Emergency contacts, allergies, dietary needs, medications
- Personal faith journey story/testimony
- Past missions/cross-cultural trip experience
- Past ministry experience in the church
- Description of personal spiritual gifts, abilities, talents
- Personal statement/ Reasons for wanting to go on this missions trip
- Passport information (if applicable)
- One or more pastoral references (and forms for reference to complete)
- One or more personal references (and forms for reference to complete)
- Statement of commitment to time required to prepare for trip (including attendance at all team training events)
- Clear information on non-refundable deposit, raising funds, trip costs, payment methods, separate itineraries. Signed agreement to the above.
- Signed agreement to accuracy of application information
- Emergency medical release form
- Short-term release of liability form
- Team Covenant
- Church's Core Convictions and Beliefs on Missions Trips

Along with the application, be sure to collect the non-refundable deposit, without which candidates will not be considered for team participation. Applications can be reviewed by the Missions Pastor and Team leader for participant suitability. Contacting each candidate personally is essential to let them know whether they've been chosen to participate on the trip. For those who have not been chosen, outline clear steps that will help make them eligible for future trips.

**Conduct background checks, interview potential trip participants; determine age limits, determine maximum headcount.**

Before finalizing the team members for the trip, it is essential to conduct Criminal Records Background Checks on all applicants. Include an Authorization and Request for Criminal Records Check release form to be signed in the Application Form. Plus, it will be beneficial to interview potential trip participants, especially those who have never participated on any missions trip in the past. Determining age limits for trip members (i.e., no one under 18) will be helpful in ensuring that the trip is appropriate for all members and will not be emotionally challenging for younger members. Finally, determine a maximum headcount and stick to it. A team that is too big can quickly get out of hand and may cause problems for the ministry the team intends to serve.



# Design an Excellent and Beneficial Trip

It is the job of the Missions Pastor and the team leader to work together to design a trip that has multi-dimensional benefits.





# Planning Travel

The travel for a Summer Missions Trip can be one of the most challenging and frustrating parts of the entire experience.

Many times, large groups of people travel many, many hours to the other side of the world, changing planes several times, waiting long periods in ill-equipped airports, eating insufficient meals, and wondering about the hygiene in restrooms and lounges. Alas, it is a necessary evil to accomplish all that God has in store for the team upon arrival at the final destination.

A key to successful travel is at the very beginning of the trip planning process. Plan travel at least nine months in advance, longer if possible. Secure (refundable! airline tickets as soon as trip participants are finalized. Consider the use of a [travel agent](#) specializing in tours and group travel, possibly a “consolidator” who can work with the airlines to get a batch of tickets for a reduced price. When possible, choose flights that are most direct, but also financially viable. Non-direct flights are certainly cheaper but consider the health of the team if extra layovers will be too exhausting. If a long layover is the only option, consider allowing sightseeing time in the layover city for the emotional benefit of the team.

Fly together. Team leadership will most certainly receive multiple requests for separate itineraries. The best policy is to disallow any separate itineraries. Avoid people meeting you there. Flying together builds team unity and avoids the chaos that can ensue if people traveling separate from the team are unduly delayed or re-routed. Travel together.

Finally, secure travel insurance. It is generally not expensive but can be a lifesaver when the unexpected happens.



# Create a Leadership Team

On any Summer Missions Team, there will be the need for qualified, experienced leadership on several levels.





### **Team Accountant**

[Managing the finances](#) of a Summer Missions Trip is an important and large job which begins even before the team leaves the church parking lot. Beginning with collecting participant deposits and support funding, and then keeping close track of the budget while on the trip, exchanging currency, managing the church credit card, and maintaining excellent receipting requires someone with meticulous administrative and bookkeeping skills, as well as impenetrable integrity.

### **Communications Leader**

Providing updates to prayer partners, financial supporters, and the church in general is an essential part of the team's responsibility while on the trip. Because of the busy nature of the team's schedule, writing emails and reports on their activities may be challenging. Assigning a team member to be the [Communications Leader](#) will help prioritize the crafting of inspirational stories that will help people at home understand all God is doing during the Summer Missions Trip. The Communications Leader can also help train team members on the best way to communicate with their prayer partners and supporters, while also ensuring safety in communications when Trips take teams to restricted access countries.

### **Team Medical Professional**

The physical health of team members is of utmost importance. Therefore, it is essential that the Team Leader and Missions Pastor recruit a medical professional to join the team and be responsible to help all trip participants stay healthy. The Team Doctor/Nurse can give good advice on health and hygiene, as well as dietary and hydration tips for physical thriving. In the event of illness, they can be the first line of defense for treatment. In the case of serious illness, the Team Doctor/Nurse can be aware of local hospitals and clinics that can offer advanced care.



# Conduct Comprehensive Team Training

Training the team prior to the trip is essential, not only for the information that will be communicated during the sessions, but also for the teambuilding that will occur along the way.

A Summer Missions Trip is a serious undertaking and requires serious training. Therefore, multiple sessions will be required. Best practice dictates beginning team training sessions 6 months in advance. Generally, team trainings occur at least once per month on Saturdays or Sundays for three to four hours per session until the trip departure date. Team training encompasses a multitude of topics depending on the location of the trip, the purpose of the trip, the needs of the partner ministry, and the experience of the team members. Team training sessions should be required for all team members. Agreement for attendance should be included in the team covenant team members sign in their trip application.

### **Here are some important topics to be sure to cover.**

- Cross-cultural awareness; cultural information specific to trip location
- Teambuilding exercises
- Fundraising training
- How to apply for a passport and visa (if required)
- Stateside cultural experiences (visits to mosques, temples, ethnic restaurants)
- Health advice, vaccination requirements
- Trip logistics, trip schedule
- Setting expectations
- Completing and collecting needed paperwork, waivers, emergency contacts
- Distribution of books to read on cultural awareness or specialty team topics

Creating and distributing a trip binder that has all relevant information and forms can be helpful for participants to keep important paperwork in one place. This information could also be put into a cloud-based online directory for easy access to participants. Plus, recordings of Team Training Sessions can be put in the same online directory for those who must miss the sessions or who need to review important information a second time.



# Fundraising

The cost of a Summer Missions Trip is substantial. Because of the nature of the trip, it costs more than a personal vacation or more than a discounted trip across the nation.

There is funding required for safe and healthy lodging, group transportation, ministry supplies, assistance for ministry partners, and contingency accounts. For many people, [funding the cost of the trip out-of-pocket](#) is simply not possible. Therefore, most churches recommend giving friends, family, and church members the opportunity to partner in God's work through the Summer Missions Trip by making financial support contributions in response to individuals' request for trip funding.

**Most trip participants will need significant training regarding fundraising. That training should most definitely include:**

- Theology of fundraising
- Sending letters and following up personally
- Defining your personal trip vision statement
- Having small group meetings to communicate vision and make the ask
- Gathering a prayer team
- Thanking Donors and reporting progress
- The art of writing fundraising letters
- Creating a list of possible supporters

It may be helpful for team members if fundraising training resources are put in an online directory for their further use. Samples of effective fundraising letters, helpful articles on excellent fundraising, tips on small group meetings, how to craft a personal vision statement, and the church's vision of mission can all be posted online for participants' ease of use.

In addition to personal fundraising, the Team Leader may consider holding fundraising events (bake sales, car washes, bagging groceries, etc.) to help lessen the amount each individual team member must raise on their own.

Finally, [social media](#) can be a helpful way to raise awareness of the fundraising need. If the Summer Missions Trip is going to a place that is not restricted access, train team members on the best way to use their social media presence to raise funds as well. Please note, however, that a combination of all these methods is always best. Do not rely on social media to raise all the funds for individual team members. Personal interaction with prayer partners and financial partners is always the most effective way to raise money.



# Packing Party!

Summer Missions Trips require  
an abundance of special supplies  
and equipment.



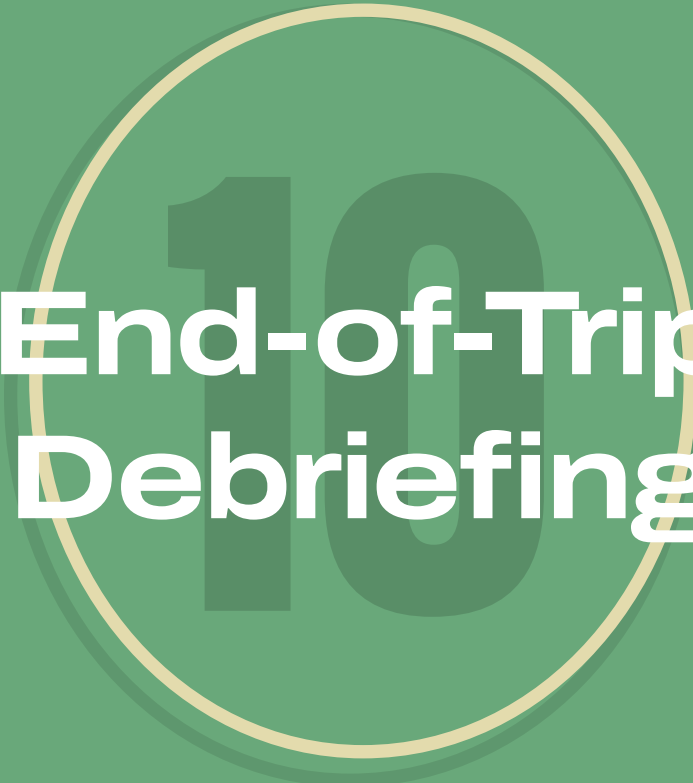




# Daily Team Meetings

During the daily course of the Summer Missions Trip, one of the most important responsibilities of the Team Leader is to communicate clearly with the team and be aware of their changing emotions and experiences.





# End-of-Trip Debriefing

After a week or two, everyone has  
worked hard and given it their all.



**Hopefully, by the time the team returns home, it will be with rejoicing, knowing that the Summer Missions Trip accomplished the team's goals, operated within the overall missions strategy of the church, and was an encouragement and true source of God's help to the ministry partner. Hopefully there has been an invitation to come back next year!**

The good times and the camaraderie don't have to end there. After everyone is united with their loved ones and has recovered from jet lag and lack of hydration and sleep, here are two things that can help team members continue to process their experiences, as well as draw in loved ones and church members to everything that God has done.

#### **Host a Report Night.**

Gather friends, family and church members together for a good, old-fashioned slide show, complete with photos, stories, anecdotes, testimonies of God's faithfulness and a whole lot of thanks for those who gave their prayers and support. Offer a tasty dessert and an opportunity for everyone to ask questions and interact with team members freely.

#### **Plan a team reunion.**

Team reunions offer team members the opportunity to discuss the trip and how life has changed for them since going on the trip. Ask people to share stories of how the lessons they learned during the trip have been integrated into their everyday lives. Discuss the challenges they've faced since returning home and how God has remained faithful. Talk about the clarity of vision for future ministry each team member may have. Make plans for future trips and ask for feedback.

*Overall?*

**PRAISE GOD  
FOR ALL THAT  
HE HAS DONE!**

# Choosing the Right Ministry Partner

## **The know-how you need from experts you trust.**

ACS Technologies is the original pioneer of Church Management Software (ChMS). We are firmly dedicated to serving local churches all over North America by providing the best-in-class ministry software and service solutions that help you fulfill Christ's mission for your Church.

## **Tools and support to strengthen churches.**

We build great software, but we don't stop there. We have a "service-first" approach that truly sets us apart. With hundreds of dedicated support and consulting personnel, your staff can reach our team 24/7. We're in your corner to help you with the ministry challenges you face every day.

## **Ideas and solutions powered by integrity.**

Integrity is real for us, and it means consistently being faithful stewards by doing the right thing for church success. We have earned the trust of pastors, church staff, congregants, our employees, and colleagues for over 40 years.

## **A plan to meet your needs and move your ministry.**


We're not just interested in satisfied customers. We see ourselves as your real ministry partner and will work with you to make disciples that will last for an eternity. We're excited to talk about your goals, create a plan together, and set you up with the software, service, and resources you need.

## **We believe in YOU!**

ACS Technologies believes in the local church. Over 75% of our team has experience serving in their local churches. We know firsthand that serving the Church means serving people, and we take seriously our commitment to helping ministries like yours achieve their God-given mandate - to make disciples in their communities, states, and across the world.

## Let's Talk

We know the challenges of switching or implementing new technology and how that can be intimidating. But we also know the unbelievable changes that have happened within churches that have partnered with us for their ministry needs. Let's connect and see how we can assist you in the greatest thing you do - grow God's Kingdom.

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