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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 <u>ensure these Summer Missions Trips</u> 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.



Before reading the Ten Best Practices or considering any missions trip, a church and its leadership must clarify its theology of shortterm 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 <u>church willing to financially</u>
 <u>back</u> these strategies and fund objectives
 that will help the church reach its missiological
 goals?

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.



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 <u>applicants' personal testimony</u>, 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.

<u>Create a trip participant application</u> 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/crosscultural 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.

The trip must be helpful for the ministry being served, strategic for the church sending the team, as well as beneficial for the team participants themselves. It must be a careful balance between being supportive to the ministry being served, but not creating dependency or putting them at risk for persecution. The goal in all things is to be encouraging, uplifting, to use local resources, and to, ultimately, create self-sustainability. For the participants, the goal is to keep them safe and healthy, give them enough rest, ensure they are emotionally fulfilled, as well as spiritually discipled. To achieve all these things is not easy. However, when the church leadership works together with the partner ministry leadership in true collaboration that has been developed over time, with trust and ownership being key factors, a trip can be designed that will be both effective and valuable.

Another key trip design consideration is determining the trip cost. One of the first questions every potential trip participant asks is, "What will it cost?" They are worried about raising money or covering the cost themselves. They compare it to the cost of a family vacation. They wonder if it can be done cheaper. As church leadership, however, the cost must be set intentionally and specifically to achieve the trip goals, remembering all the desired end results for the partner ministry and the participants. Therefore, when creating the budget for the trip, build every expense in, but do the best to make the trip financially viable. Do not cut corners on the essentials but make an effort to be frugal when possible. Missions Trips are often costly. However, the expense is worth it when the team reflects on all the good done in so many lives as a result.



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 rerouted. Travel together.

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



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

Many missions teams are split into ministry teams that each have a separate focus. Those ministry teams need to be organized and led. There are also special roles for qualified individuals to play that require unique skills and resources that should be assigned and given responsibility. Here are the key leadership roles that should be distributed early in the trip preparation process.

Team Leader

Aside from the Missions Pastor, the Team Leader is the chief leadership member of the team and has the most authority for decision making and accountability on the team. The Team Leader is ultimately responsible for the coordination of all Trip details, choosing team members, choosing and training other team leadership members, coordinating with the partner ministry being served, ensuring finances are being stewarded properly, safeguarding the physical and emotional health of team members, and accomplishing the goals of the trip and the church. The Team Leader reports to the Missions Pastor and should be a veteran traveler, an experienced ministry leader, and have led missions trips in the past.

Ministry Team Leaders

Every Summer Missions Trip will be divided into smaller teams that will serve the ministry partner in the areas of their gifts, skills, and interests. This could include, but is not limited to children's ministry, pastors training, medical team, construction work, music ministry or youth team. Each of these specialized teams will need unique preparation and training as they plan for their participation on the trip. Therefore, a Ministry Team Leader can be chosen for each ministry team to coordinate activities, assign responsibilities, and train their team members to be ready to serve in the most effective way possible.

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.



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
- Defining your personal trip vision statement
- Gathering a prayer team
- The art of writing fundraising letters
- Creating a list of possible supporters

- Sending letters and following up personally
- Having small group meetings to communicate vision and make the ask
- Thanking Donors and reporting progress

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, <u>social media</u> 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.



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

Like what?

- Medications and Medical equipment
- Tovs and school supplies
- Nutritious snacks and vitamins
- Computer equipment
- Office supplies
- Extra toiletries

... And possibly so much more. But we all know there are baggage limitations on the airlines and the amount of supplies and equipment teams can bring is not unlimited. A best practice regarding luggage is to allow every team member one personal suitcase and one "ministry" suitcase. Team members are fully responsible for their personal suitcase. However, the ministry suitcase is brought to the church in advance. Then on the appointed evening, several days before trip departure, the team comes together to pack all the ministry supplies and equipment into the ministry suitcases. Ministry Team Leaders can help to manage their ministry team's supplies and ensure that they have everything they need.

In the case of an overage of supplies, team leadership can negotiate what is needed most and what can be left behind. If some supplies must be left behind due to lack of space, it may be possible to buy supplies after arrival with the ministry partner. Cooperation with the ministry partner ahead of time will help the Team Leader to understand what will be available locally.



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.

The best way to do these crucial things is to hold two daily team meetings every day. First, a daily morning team meeting is essential. During this time, the team can discuss the day's events, what to expect from the day's activities, review cultural information, learn from a devotional word from the Scriptures, ask about expectations that might be going unmet, allow anyone to share about what they are learning, and have candid discussions about team member health conditions. During these meetings, Team Leaders should pay close attention to anyone who might be struggling personally and give them extra counseling and emotional support.

Be sensitive and alert! If during these morning meetings, the Team Leader senses that the entire team seems to be struggling, a change in the schedule may be required. Plan a half day tourist outing to help give people a mental break. Take people shopping. Any change of pace will help clear everyone's head and prepare them for the good work that is to come.

The second important daily meeting during any Summer Missions
Trip is a short evening team meeting to debrief from the day. People
will be exhausted from the physical, mental, and emotional demands
of the day, so remember to make the meeting brief. Review the day,
take questions, allow for feedback, check on everyone's health, and
then let everyone go to bed and get some much-needed rest.



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

They have endured numerous cross-cultural situations which have confused and frustrated them. They have had spiritual experiences in which God came through in miraculous ways they never expected. It has been a life-changing time. This becomes an important time to harness the emotions surrounding these events and capture the learning that has taken place. None of this should go to waste or be forgotten.

To make the most of this great opportunity for growth, before beginning the journey home, plan for a half or full day of debriefing in a special location (i.e., a resort, a special restaurant, a beach, etc.) to help the team members mentally unwind and relax. Separating to a special place will help team members to let go of any crosscultural tension they may be holding. It will help them feel more at home. They can clean up properly and rest well in comfort. They can eat special food and drink cool beverages. They can play in the sea and the sand.

But it's not just about enjoyment. Team leadership can hold special meetings during which the Team Leader can intentionally guide team members in a careful review and evaluation of every aspect of the trip. Spend extra time talking deeply about the personal spiritual implications of the trip and how this will affect team members' lives moving forward when they get home. Encourage journaling and time spent alone in prayer and reflection. Remind participants that the trip doesn't end emotionally and spiritually when the plane takes off for home. The processing will continue for weeks and months and even years to come. Team members, all of whom have shared the same experience, can now lean on one another in the future as they see just where God will take them.

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 the 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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