

Pre-Trip Preparation

Planning

Timeline: One of the most important things you can do pre-trip is to plan out the steps necessary to launch the team. Taking into account the items below, work out a schedule with dates to ensure that everything is covered. This includes the pre-trip activities, trip and post-trip times as well.

Application: It's helpful to have a short application process that includes a brief testimony of faith, why they want to go, and a few references.

Team Meetings: Plan a series of regular and increasingly frequent team meetings as you get closer to the trip. The agenda should include: informational updates, team sharing/questions, devotional and/or Scriptural thoughts, and prayer.

Communication: Pick a strategy for communicating with the team between meetings for questions and encouragement. If the team includes youth, make sure their parents are part of the communication. Also, don't forget to communicate the costs and the entire trip timeline with them, including the debrief and sharing times post-trip.

Logistics

Immunizations: The missionaries as well as your local health department should have this information. Get on this early as some immunizations require multiple doses and may have to be given well in advance of the trip date.

Passport and VISAs: Don't delay on passports (require copies with the application) and make sure you fully understand any VISA requirements.

Insurance: Look into travel, evacuation, vehicle (if needed), and health insurance needs and options. Your church's liability policy may provide some of these coverages, so start with your church's insurance agent.

Physical Preparation: If the trip involves hiking, strenuous work, or other elements that require conditioning or preparation, make sure team members have a set routine that helps them build stamina and physical conditioning.

Fundraising

Prayer Letters: Encourage prayer letters even if they are fully funded; the prayer support is vital.

Fundraisers: If you are doing events, seek to find ways that are both profitable but also encourage connection – especially between people in different life-stages (e.g. senior adults, children, college age, etc.).

RMD Grant: Take advantage of the RMD grant which can be found on the RMD homepage: rmdcma.com, and then clicking on the Missions tab. Look for the STM Trip grant application on the right hand side of the page.

Team Meeting Topics

Theology of Missions: Very early on in the team process it will be important to establish the theological groundings for why we do short-term mission trips. God's heart for the lost, the increase in worship to God, the reward of Christ's sufferings are all great reasons. Guard against the belief that we are improving on the justice of God (i.e. giving poor sinners a chance to be saved since they've never heard) - Romans 1 is a good corrective to this.

Purpose of the Trip: We are there to serve the long-term workers, not to serve as we wish. We are also not there primarily to sightsee, relax, or enjoy some 'experience'. These elements may naturally occur during the trip, but primarily we are there for the sake of Jesus. We are also not there primarily for our spiritual benefit. It is true that God will work in us, but we do not go with the self-centered goal of using them and the experience to grow ourselves spiritually.

Posture of the Team: Our time is not our own; it is owned by Jesus. We are not the only people to have ever lived, and we have never lived in this context. Therefore, postures of flexibility, graciousness, curiosity, humility, and teachability are to be at the core of the team.

Your Heart: Why are you going? What do you hope to 'get' out of this trip? Of this, what is good and to be held closely, and what should be released? Search us, O God, and know our hearts (Ps 139:23-24).

Cultural Context: What are the social norms? Dress? Communication? What must the team be prepared to avoid or embrace? How do we navigate social media expectations? What historic dynamics may be shaping the cultural and ethnic norms of where we will be serving?

Spiritual Expectations: The enemy loves to work in the environments of tiredness, unfamiliarity, frustration, and conflict. The team should be aware of this and thinking on and praying against these things.

Testimony: Have the team write out and share with the team their testimony (maybe 1-2 each time you meet). Make sure they include 1) their life before Christ (~25%), 2) the circumstances that led them to Christ (~35%), and 3) how their life has been changed by Christ (~40%). These should be no longer than five minutes. This is good team building, but also good as they prepare to possibly share on the trip.

Team Building

Think about ways to get the team together in natural environments to connect well before the trip. One great way to do this is to play together. That's right, in Jesus' Name it might be a great idea to plan some times to do fun things together to help the team gel.

Mid-Trip Components

Daily Devo & Debrief:

Consider starting each day with a devotional and some connection time. Consider ending the day with a time of debrief, prayer, and maybe even worship. Some possible questions might be: what was God showing you about Himself today? About yourself? What was good today? What was difficult? How can we be praying for you?

Words of Encouragement:

Mission trips can be a great time to learn how God has wired and gifted you to serve and participate in the Body of Christ. One way to do this is to give everyone a list with everyone's name on it and a blank space below. Throughout the week, encourage them to make notes of encouragement about their teammates. No criticism is allowed, not even constructive criticism. At the end of the trip, the leader will collect and anonymously compile all of the notes for each person. Every team member then gets their compilation of encouragement and other positive observations.

Spiritual Leader / Logistic Lead:

Consider having two leaders on the trip, one to oversee the spiritual side of the trip, and the other to oversee the details or work project side of the trip (choose titles that work for your trip). This can free the team leaders to focus on better on their respective roles, especially if a large work project is involved. Since these are primarily spiritual trips, the spiritual leader is the team leader.

Shared Content:

Sometimes it's helpful to have something that the group is going through together to help process the experience or learn a spiritual lesson. For example, one group broke Psalm 119 into its 22 sections and had their team write out and reflect on one section in the each morning and evening. It was an incredible experience for this team to have this common exercise and discipline throughout the trip.

Post-Trip Follow-up

Meet Right Away:

Don't let too much time pass between when you return and when you meet as a team to debrief (reminder – this should be set and communicated before you leave). The enemy loves to steal what has been sown on the trip by rushing people back into the rhythms of normal life. It's best to have a debriefing meeting time set before you leave on your trip.

Share With The Church:

Many churches want to have their team share as soon as possible after they return. If your team returns on a Friday, it is probably not wise to put them on stage Sunday morning. The next weekend might be much better. Along with this, consider having an extended sharing time over a meal so that people can ask questions and learn more.

Next Steps:

As people in the church hear about the team and their work, they will want to be involved. Be prepared to give them multiple concrete steps to get involved.

Process The Experience:

As you meet with the team for debrief, lead them in processing their experience. This will take prayerful and thoughtful intentionality. Here are some questions that might be helpful: What were my first feelings coming back into the States? What did I hear God say to me on the trip? What needs to change in my life? What is a next step for me?

Prayerfully consider in advance with your church leadership ways for how team members can continue to build on what God did in and through them on this trip.