

USING MISSION VOLUNTEERS EFFECTIVELY

I. Understanding Volunteers

Without question our greatest resource, other than God Himself, is volunteers. As we work with volunteers we need to understand their needs and motives. One of their greatest needs is to be needed. That requires us to make sure we have something meaningful for them to do, and that we communicate to them that we are genuinely appreciative of their efforts.

The realm of motives is somewhat murky. People may or may not have pure motives for volunteering. Some may even be unaware of all the motivational factors that influence them. Lyle Schaller, in *The Parish Paper*, says volunteers are motivated by a complex assortment of overlapping factors that include:

1. A need for self-fulfillment.
2. A response to a call to commitment.
3. A desire to serve.
4. A hunger for community and to feel needed.
5. A vision of making a meaningful contribution to a worthy cause.
6. A yearning for the satisfaction that results from achievement of a goal.
7. A response to a sense of duty or obligation.
8. An expectation that this will be a learning or an enriching experience.
9. A longing for power and influence.
10. A response to God's love and a call to reflect that love by serving one's neighbor.
11. A desire to express one's faith through works.
12. A search to find meaning and purpose in life.

Experience with mission teams suggests the addition of "tradition" as a major motivation. Teams that have worked with the same church or on the same type of project for several years tend to use the tradition of "the mission trip" itself as a prime motivation.

Bill Hybel's book *The Volunteer Revolution* would be a worthwhile read for church leaders who are seeking to be more effective in their use of volunteers.

II. Planning Imperatives

The first step is to have an honest, objective understanding of your ministry setting and the history of your church or the area you are cultivating for a new church plant. Your setting can be a community in an unentered county where there is not an evangelical church of any kind. It can be a community in which a single, small Southern Baptist Church has struggled for years to establish its identity only to realize that it still remains relatively invisible. It can be an exciting, growing church that is making a significant impact in its community. The history can be brief as that of a brand new church start where the need for an evangelical witness is the central story, or it can be extensive in that of an established church with several years of events to encapsulate.

Another part of understanding your ministry setting is having a knowledge of the demographics of your area. Data is available from several sources (your association has access to several), and you will also want to include religious data. A brief summary of your ministry setting, church

history and community demographics is an invaluable tool for planning as well as an important tool to help communicate with mission teams. Once you have a grasp of your ministry setting, two questions will be sitting at your doorstep: “In what areas do church members need to be more effectively equipped and encouraged?” and “How can I more effectively reach my community for Christ?” The answers to these questions form your objectives. These objectives dictate your goals and help you establish your actions. [See the attached Objective and Project Goal and Action Plans work sheets.]

Then comes the question, “Can volunteers from another church assist me in meeting these needs?” The answer can be, YES! Action plans in which mission volunteers can be involved are: Vacation Bible School, Backyard Bible Clubs, construction, survey, music and drama presentations, sports clinics, block parties, prayer walking, staffing of a booth at a community event or county fair to name a few. In reality, the activities are limited only by your imagination and the gifts of mission volunteers.

Often the greatest blessings and most effective ministries are a by-product instead of the major goal of a volunteer mission project. (1) This happens when a mission team participant uses his/her unique gifts in an area beyond the major project. A good question to ask the coordinator is, “Does someone who will be coming have special abilities that will not be utilized in the activities we have already planned?” [A mission team that came to assist w/VBS also helped in construction of a storage building, ministry to singles, and equipping of senior adult ministry leaders.] (2) This happens because God is in control. [A Mississippi dentist who had previously worked as a dental mission volunteer in Africa was on an Alaskan construction project when he met a first time volunteer dentist who was wondering how to prepare for a trip to The Gambia. He was scheduled to work in the clinic the Mississippi dentist had set up a few years before.]

III. Establishing a Well Defined Working Relationship with Volunteers

The euphoria of finding a mission team interested in helping your church always dissolves into the hard work of preparing to effectively utilize them. A criticism often heard from volunteers is that the church failed to prepare adequately for the arrival of the team. Working with volunteers involves more than saying yes, finding them a place to stay, and having something for them to do. When you make the initial contact with a prospective volunteer begin at once to build a relationship. Prayer is an important step in building that relationship—not only immersing the whole planning process with prayer, but also praying over the phone with volunteers.

Make sure the following items are agreed upon and clearly communicated in writing before the volunteers leave home: [See the attached sample volunteer covenant.]

- The objective(s) of the project
- Specific actions that will be undertaken
- Balance between work and leisure
- Clearly defined chain of command and appropriate lines of communication
- Arrival and departure dates
- Type and cost of lodging
- Cooking or meal arrangements
- Who will provide or purchase the needed materials
- The appropriate dress (some churches tend to be less formal & less restrictive.)
- The cross-cultural challenge of working in your setting
- Talk about weather differences—cool evenings, easier sunburns, etc.

IV. The Project

Provide a memorable welcome and informative orientation time. A packet of information on your community, including a map should be awaiting each volunteer. A detailed schedule of activities including your worship and Sunday School times should be included. Your packet should also provide clear information on housing and meal arrangements. Any other information the volunteers could conceivably need should be included. The orientation time can be used to clarify supervisory responsibilities and to discuss cultural issues.

Another often heard criticism is that volunteers come and work for the church and not with the church. This brings us to one of our greatest challenges--involving our membership with the activities of the mission team. They are here to work alongside us, not to work for us. Without effective interaction between volunteers and church members we produce a welfare mentality which can be deadly. Talk about teamwork and cooperation. Inform your membership that volunteers are giving their time, energy and resources to assist us with the Kingdom work to which God has called us. Emphasize the need for continuity and relationship building with the contacts made by the volunteers.

Following months of preparation it is now time to Just Do It!

Make sure the send off is just as memorable as the welcome. Provide time for volunteers to say good-bye to the church: preferably a formal time—maybe during a worship service. A gift symbolic of the spirit of cooperation or a piece of local memorabilia can be given to the leader of the group. It does not have to be expensive to be meaningful and memorable. I have used a “three piece chicken’s dinner” [three kernels of corn] and an “Omaha stake” [a wooden stake with Omaha stamped on it] to say thank you.

V. Follow-up and Evaluation

The final criticism we must overcome is the complaint that volunteers come and give their best, but nothing is done to follow-up. We have a tendency to think that when the team leaves the project is over. Remember the objectives you established will relate to equipping your membership or evangelizing your community. If you have planned the work and worked your plan, you will just be getting warmed up.

Survey forms, VBS registration cards, Backyard Bible club enrollment forms, block party registration forms, etc. should be used to secure prospect information. Make sure you emphasize the importance of getting complete information—it is imperative for follow-up to be effective. Make sure you design your projects so that you have some way of gathering personal information on those who participate from the community.

Send a thank you note the same day the team leaves to express your appreciation for the work done. A week or two later, send a project evaluation form to the volunteer or to the team leader. [See attached copy of Partnership Project Evaluation form.] That would be a good time to express again your appreciation for their commitment and to communicate what has already been done in the area of follow-up. If you have a church newsletter or prayer letter, add the leaders of the team to your mailing list.

Remember: It’s all about God!

OBJECTIVE

OBJECTIVE (A broad statement of intent):

Goal 1 (Specific Measurable Statement—have several goals for each objective.): _____

Activity 1 (Determine several actions for each goal.): _____

Activity 2: _____

Activity 3: _____

Goal 2: _____

Activity 1: _____

Activity 2: _____

Activity 3: _____

Goal 3: _____

Activity 1: _____

Activity 2: _____

Activity 3: _____

MINISTRY PROJECT GOAL AND ACTION PLANS

Goal (Transferred from Objective work sheet.): _____

Action 1: _____

Projected dates to begin and complete: _____

Person responsible for seeing action completed: _____

Resources needed:

People: _____

Finances: _____

Services: _____

Facilities: _____

Other: _____

Action 2: _____

Projected dates to begin and complete: _____

Person responsible for seeing action completed: _____

Resources needed:

People: _____

Finances: _____

Services: _____

Facilities: _____

Other: _____

Action 3: _____

Projected dates to begin and complete: _____

Person responsible for seeing action completed: _____

Resources needed:

People: _____

Finances: _____

Services: _____

Facilities: _____

Other: _____

VOLUNTEER COVENANT

The purpose of this covenant is to facilitate communication between the project supervisor and the mission volunteer team supervisor. The covenant should be negotiated at the time the partnership link is made. It should be reviewed periodically through the planning process and affirmed when the volunteer team arrives on the field.

Host Supervisor: _____ Team Supervisor: _____

Church: _____ Church: _____

Address: _____ Address: _____

Telephone: _____ Telephone: _____

e-mail: _____ e-mail: _____

Host church ministry setting: _____

Host church strategies/goals: _____

Ministry action project(s): _____

Project dates: _____
depart home arrive on field depart field arrive home

Transportation to field: _____ On field: _____

Lodging: _____ Meals: _____

Provided by: _____ Provided by: _____

Type of lodging: _____ Cooking facilities: _____

Cost to volunteer: _____ Cost of volunteer: _____

Materials/supplies provided by host church (e.g., VBS materials, Bible study materials, promotion fliers, construction supplies, sports equipment, etc.): _____

Materials/supplies provided by volunteer team (e.g., VBS materials, Bible study materials, promotion fliers, construction supplies, sports equipment, etc.): _____

Appropriate clothing: _____

Host church cultural or custom requirements: _____

Training and Orientation:

Prior to reaching field: _____

On field: _____

Host Church Supervisor

Volunteer Team Supervisor

MISSION PROJECT EVALUATION

Today's date _____ Project date(s) _____

Mission Team Church/Association _____

Mission Team project coordinator _____

Host Church _____

Project coordinator _____

Project involved the following activities _____

How would you rate the experience from your team's perspective? (Circle one)

Excellent--10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1--Poor

Comments: _____

How would you rate the effectiveness of the project based on the stated objectives of the sponsoring church?

Excellent--10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1--Poor

Comments: _____

What do you see as the greatest joy your team experienced? _____

What do you see as the greatest challenge your team confronted? _____

What is one thing you did that will definitely be a part of every project in the future? _____

If you could have changed one thing, what would it have been? _____
