

A Guide to Short-term Mission *for Churches*

**Is your church
planning a short-
term mission trip?**

Do you want to ensure your mission is gospel-focused, God-centred, as well as beneficial for everyone involved?

This guide goes through the goals and values of short-term mission, as well as key the components of a trip: *pre-field, on-field and post-field.*

Know what questions to ask and which steps to take to help ensure your mission is a success.

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Introduction.



As followers of Christ we have a calling to share the good news of salvation with the world. The world is next door, across the country, and overseas. We want to do this faithfully in a way that honours God and places no impediments to the work of His Spirit in the lives of all people, even as He does His work through us.

This guide was put together by Missions Interlink to help churches ensure that their short term mission ministry fulfils this vision for mission.

Some terms explained:

‘Missional’ means a life or activity being undertaken with the intention to go and make disciples.

‘Tenets of faith’ is a description of the collective belief of the people in your organisation, usually in dot point form.

A **‘learner-servant’** is someone whose goal is to serve and build up the body of believers and the communities they work in but who recognises that they aren’t fully equipped in this task and so commits also to learning from those whom they serve, and from others, in order to serve better.

‘Debrief’ is understanding what we have experienced / observed and can take place after any event, including training and on-field experiences.

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Goals.

Missions Interlink believes there are five goals that underpin a short-term mission.

They are:

1. To serve the purposes of sharing the good news of salvation
2. To serve the purposes of the discipling of believers
3. To serve with humility in the name of Christ
4. To undertake the above activities across boundaries of culture, and
5. To encourage participants to become more Christ-like and missional in their lives.

These five goals are inseparable.

Values.

Missions Interlink identifies four key values which need to be adhered to for the short-term mission to meet these goals:

1. Mission takes place because of God's command in his word;
2. Mission takes place according to the values of God's kingdom;
3. Senders, goers, and receivers are all participants; and
4. Short-term mission is a process, not an event.

These four values lead to the required components of a short-term mission during the three stages: pre-field, on-field and post-field.

We'll go through each of these values and list the components that these values require in short-term mission.

Each component is described briefly, followed by a list of questions that can be used as a checklist to determine whether they are present in the short-term mission and if they're being undertaken effectively.

Values.

Mission takes place because of God's command. Mission does not take place because it accrues blessing or merit points or for fun and excitement. Remembering the reason for mission places all of the other values in their proper perspective.

Mission takes place according to the values of God's kingdom. This means that we seek to faithfully live the values of the kingdom of God in both our lives and in all aspects of the short-term mission, including relationships between participants and with others.

Senders, goers, and receivers are all participants. In some short-term missions the focus has been on the benefits for the goers in terms of exposure to another culture and faith development.

➤ However, a focus on the receiver is also needed so that the gospel is effectively proclaimed in the receiving country and that receiving believers (whether long-term workers or nationals) are served, disciplined and encouraged rather than exhausted and drained.

➤ Finally, senders also need to be included in the discipleship process to increase their commitment to local and global evangelism and assist them in their own Christian walk.

“Short-term mission is a process, not an event.”

An **event focus** on short-term mission considers the program as separate from the rest of the participants' lives. It views the gospel proclamation as a sudden burst of light in a dark room and sets up the goers as people who are processed and then sent off to their next appointment.

By contrast a **process focus** recognises that God has already been at work in all of the participants' lives, both believers and unbelievers, and he will continue to be present and at work long after the program is finished.

Therefore the program is a part of the larger picture of God's work in the participants' lives. Also, a process focus requires a commitment to participants beyond the time of the program alone, in particular to follow through after the program and remain connected.

Pre-field.



Pre-field involves planning the short-term mission, recruiting participants, and preparing participants for the short-term mission.

Many of the components can be met through careful design of promotional materials and the effective screening and training of participants. It is important to check that these components include the following:

1. Doctrine/reasons for short-term mission:

Clarity and agreement of doctrine and reasons for short-term mission. Some questions to ask:

- (a) Do you have a short summary of the biblical tenets of faith affirmed by your organisation?
- (b) Do you have a short summary of your organisation's philosophy on short-term mission?
- (c) How does your short-term mission philosophy incorporate the five goals of a short-term mission and the four key values?
- (d) Do all participants in the short-term mission know your biblical tenets and short-term mission philosophy and agree to work under them?

2. Short-term mission purpose

A purpose statement or paragraph specific to a particular short-term mission trip. Some questions to ask:

- (a) What is the purpose for this short-term missions trip?
- (b) How does the purpose support the five goals and four key values?
- (c) How are participants involved in forming the purpose for the short-term missions trip, particularly receiving hosts?
- (d) Do all participants in the short-term mission know the purpose and agree to work towards its execution?

3. Roles of participants

Agreement on the expected roles of participants (senders, goers, receivers) and a realistic expectation that they can fulfil their roles. This is much easier if it is written down.

- (a) What is the role of each participant in the short-term missions trip?
- (b) How do the roles ensure that the key values are practised?
- (c) How have you confirmed that each participant understands their role?
- (d) How have you confirmed that each participant is able to fulfil their role?
- (e) How have you allowed participants to ask questions and clarify the expectations on them?

4. Expectations of short-term mission

Agreement on the expectations of participants (senders, goers, receivers) of the short-term mission. Again, it helps to write it down.

- (a) How have you gained understanding of where each participant is 'at' before the short-term mission?
- (b) How have you confirmed the expectations of each participant?
- (c) What are the expectations of the short-term mission of each participant?
- (d) How have you confirmed that the expectations are realistic?
- (e) How have you ensured that the expectations are consistent with the four core values and five goals?
- (f) How have you dealt with the issue of expectations not being met (eg due to planned tasks not happening when on the field)?

5. Cultural appropriateness

All activities in the short-term mission (including planning and evaluation) will consider all the cultures of all participants and how to achieve the short-term mission's purpose taking these into account. Questions to ask:

- (a) What are the cultures of the participants involved in your short-term mission?
- (b) How are these cultures considered in the design of the short-term mission?
- (c) How are participants prepared for the differences between cultures?

5. Training

The effectiveness of a short-term mission is significantly increased through quality, effective, pre-field training and equipping. This is not merely meeting to work through logistical issues but also to equip for ministry.

- (a) How are you preparing the participants to be cross-culturally sensitive, cross-culturally aware, and cross-cultural learner-servants?
- (b) What are you doing to help participants learn more about each other and learn to work effectively together?
- (c) How are you preparing participants to become more Christ-like?
- (d) What preparation do you need to provide participants for the tasks they will be asked to undertake during their short-term mission?
- (e) How are you preparing participants to evaluate, process and apply their experience after the short-term mission?
- (f) What resources do you need to secure to provide effective pre-field preparation to participants?

6. Administration

Accountability and organisation of a short-term mission is important to ensure credibility and maintain the integrity of the short-term mission.

- (a) How do you ensure accountability relating to the management of finances for the short-term mission?
- (b) What documentation is required from participants before undertaking the short-term mission?
- (c) How do you ensure all documentation is in place before a participant commences the on-field phase of the short-term mission?
- (d) How do you ensure accuracy of documentation?

Administration continued.

(e) How do you keep records of all the short-term mission documentation, including storage and future retrieval?

(f) What are the legal and regulatory requirements related to the short-term mission?

(g) How have the legal and regulatory requirements related to the short-term mission been met and/or taken into account?

Notes.



On-field.

On-field is the execution of a particular short-term mission. Many of the components discussed here will require planning before the short-term mission to ensure they are in place and carried out.

1. Risk Management

Travelling even domestically involves some risk. Many places where short-term mission takes place have further hazards over and above recreational overseas travel. Managing these risks is important for the safety and well-being of all participants, as well as ensuring the success of the short-term mission.

- (a) What are the risks associated with the short-term mission: for example political risks, health risks, security risks, and other?
- (b) How did you determine the risks related to the short-term mission?
- (c) What is your contingency plan in the event of an emergency or crisis?
- (d) Do all goers have appropriate insurance (including emergency evacuation insurance)?
- (e) Are all goers location-aware to minimise risks, for example to only drink bottled water, carry copies of travel documents separate from the originals, etc?
- (f) How are risks minimised for receivers relating to any location-specific risks?

1. On-field Management

During the short-term mission participants will find themselves affected and changed. There will be events and experiences outside participants' control which affect them, such as exposure to poverty and injustice, culture shock and stress, difficult relationships, different weather conditions, unexpected schedule changes, or perhaps even some crisis situation.

Also remember that participants include senders and receivers as well as goers.

- (a) How are participants given the opportunity to process and debrief their experiences during the short-term mission?
- (b) How will participants be monitored regarding how they are being affected during the short-term mission?
- (c) What will you do if a participant is so severely affected that they are no longer able to fulfil their role (answer this question separately for senders, goers, and receivers)?

Notes.



Post-field.



The fourth core value is that short-term mission is a process not an event. This makes post-field engagement with the participants essential for integrating the short-term mission into the rest of God's purposes for their lives. Some of these components are linked, for example a debrief event is a good opportunity to get feedback on the short-term mission.

1. Debrief

Debrief is an opportunity for participants (senders, goers, and receivers) to process their experiences in a neutral context.

- (a) What opportunities do participants have to debrief from their experiences?
- (b) What resources are provided to participants to help them through the debriefing process?
- (c) How do you ensure, insofar as it is possible, that each participant is debriefed?
- (d) What opportunities can be provided to participants for ongoing debriefing and assimilation of their experiences?
- (e) What will you do should a participant be adversely affected from their experience and in their debrief process?

2. Feedback

It is important to learn from the things done well and the things not done well so that these lessons can be incorporated into future short-term missions. Much of this knowledge is carried with participants so it is essential for them to be involved in the feedback process.

This component is linked in to the pre-field phase of all short-term missions – if the lessons from previous short-term missions aren't incorporated into new ones, then mistakes will be repeated and positive actions won't be repeated.

- (a) How do you record your own experiences and observations of the short-term mission?
- (b) How do you effectively find out and record the experiences and observations of each category of participants?
- (c) How are lessons learnt recorded for future short-term missions?
- (d) How are lessons learnt incorporated into future short-term missions?
- (e) How are lessons learnt communicated to other participants?

3. Follow-through

The outcomes of short-term mission need to be incorporated into participants' lives. Follow through is a process that facilitates participants towards positive change and action as a result of their experiences, as compared to debrief which is simply describing what a participant has felt and experienced.

- (a) How do you maintain contact with short-term mission participants?
- (b) How do you work with participants for whom the short-term mission experience has been negative and help them to process?

Follow-through continued

(c) How do you encourage participants to take action on their short-term mission involvement (for example, receivers may incorporate short-term mission teams as part of their wider ministry)?

(d) What avenues will participants have to share their stories with the broader Christian community?

(e) How do you encourage participants to assimilate lessons learned into their daily lives?

(f) What opportunities are there for participants to continue with cross-cultural ministry and engagement?

(g) What resources are available to assist participants with continued growth and ministry involvement?

Notes.



Overview checklist.



The previous components in this guide have addressed specific stages of the short-term mission process.

Use this checklist of questions as a way to review and summarise this guide and evaluate how your short-term mission achieves its goals and adheres to the values.

1. How does your short-term mission serve the purposes of sharing of the good news of salvation?
2. How does your short-term mission serve the purposes of the discipleship of believers?
3. How does your short-term mission demonstrate humble servanthood in the name of Jesus Christ?
4. How does your short-term mission cross cultural barriers in the way you answered questions 1 – 3? (merely undertaking activities in another cultural environment does not necessarily answer this question)
5. How does your short-term mission help the participants become more Christ-like and missional with their lives?
6. How do you know you are successfully contributing to the achievement of these goals (becoming more Christ-like and missional)?
7. How does your short-term mission embody that it is part of the response to God's command to go and make disciples?
8. In what aspects of your short-term mission do you need to work more closely to the values of God's kingdom?
9. How are senders, goers, and receivers each involved as participants in the short-term mission?
10. How does your short-term mission contribute in an ongoing way to the work of God in participants' lives and in the broader world?

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