

CODE OF BEST PRACTICE FOR SHORT TERM MISSIONS



TEAM PREPARATION & DEBRIEFING

Commitment: Our mission team members and the project will be carefully prepared and effectively debriefed.

Background: Things go wrong on mission, that's just a given. This is all the more reason for careful planning and realistic team member briefing. Things also go wrong after mission in participants' emotional and spiritual lives. We need to debrief and care for our members effectively.

We recommend the following examples of best practice in the areas of team preparation and debriefing.

Resources: Mission trips must have a clear and achievable budget with appropriate accountability systems in place for management of funds.

Recreational Time: Mission trips are about mission, and while time off and time out is necessary, it is important that the team's main focus is mission, especially when fund-raising for 'mission' is involved.

Involvement: Both the host community and the team members need to have a clear understanding of what is expected of them.

Screening of applicants: Being part of a mission trip requires a certain level of character and maturity to ensure that the team and its reputation are not dragged down. Proper application forms will be filled out and the names of references supplied and followed up. Police checks or a working with children type check is encouraged for those trips ministering to minors.

Team cohesion: Because the strength of relationships is often the backbone of the mission trip's experience, best practice is to enable teams to bond well before the trip.

Debriefing: Team members will be regularly debriefed and pastorally followed up for 12 months following re-entry.



A collaborative work of CRA Resource Centre and the RTC

LEADERSHIP

Commitment - We will send well-managed teams led by committed, faithful and well-equipped leaders.

Background - As in other areas of life, effective leadership is crucial for the success of short term mission projects. Targeted selection, training and support of leaders should, therefore, be an integral part of how we do short term mission.

We recommend the following examples of best practice when it comes to the selection and support of team leaders:

Character and Christian Commitment: Leaders should be people who are mature in their Christian faith and who consistently strive to mould their characters according to the teachings of Scripture.

Leadership Ability: Leaders should be people with the ability and the gift to effectively lead ministry teams. Ideally this ability and gift should have been tested in a variety of settings prior to the mission trip.

Adaptability and Cultural Sensitivity: Since the majority of short term mission trips will take place in cross-cultural settings, leaders should be willing and able to exercise their leadership in ways that will be compatible, as far as possible, with local sensibilities. Leaders should also work hard to ensure that team members are equipped in the area of cross-cultural effectiveness.

Effective Delegation: Teams consist of people with different abilities and spiritual gifts. Team leaders should strive to utilise the people on the team in ways that will make the best possible use of these gifts and abilities and delegate tasks accordingly.

Servant Leadership: As Christian leaders, team leaders should seek to consistently emulate and model the example of Christ as the great servant leader. This should be evidenced in not attempting to 'lord it over' team members, but instead seeking to provide the space for all team members to exercise their abilities and gifts in the service of God and humanity.



VALIDATION & EVALUATION

Commitment: We will evaluate honestly and wisely the value and impact of our trips on the host community, team members and sending churches.

Background: Short term mission trips are easily planned by people who know of a need and have contacts in the community. We understand that mission trips can easily 'impose' their mission upon communities and that occasionally 'pet' projects can consume resources better used in other areas.

We recommend the following examples of best practice in the areas of validation and evaluation of mission trips.

Determining need: We will determine the mission project in consultation with the community and long term missionaries in the area and agree to a purpose statement between all parties. This will ensure that our short term missions respond to the neediest priorities of the host community in a way that establishes a healthy long term impact.

Validation: The sender and receiver will agree together on the length of trip, its resources, required personnel and costing.

Wisdom of experience: When planning a trip, the organisers should seek the wisdom and approval of a local church leadership and a current/former long term missionaries regarding the purpose and intent of the trip.

Evaluation: The sender and the receiver will honestly evaluate the trip against its purpose 2 months after the trip returns, as well as 12 months after the trip returns. These evaluations will consider both the team outcomes and ministry activity outcomes.

CULTURE & DEVELOPMENT

Commitment: We will seek to always minister in culturally appropriate and sustainable ways

Background: Most short term mission teams will minister in cross-cultural settings and many will also serve in situations characterised by high levels of poverty and underdevelopment. There are, therefore, often significant possibilities for cultural misunderstanding and/or creating a culture of dependence. The items of best practice listed below have been designed to minimise these risks as far as possible.

We recommend the following examples of best practice in the areas of culture and development:

Thorough Preparation: Team members should be thoroughly prepared to serve in cross-cultural and underdeveloped settings. Team leaders should therefore take great care to equip and train team members to be able to minister in effective and responsible ways in such areas. It is highly recommended that, where possible, members of the host culture participate in training sessions.

Operating with a Biblical View of Culture: Team members should always be encouraged to recognise that the Gospel is not fully compatible with any human culture (including Western culture). Instead, there are elements in every culture that are affirmed and challenged by the Gospel. They should not slip into the default mode of elevating their culture above others, but should seek to learn from the host culture. Where there are things in the host culture that are directly contrary to the Gospel, these should be addressed in a respectful and responsible manner and only after consultation with local believers.

Operating with Sensitivity and Respect: Cultural norms differ widely; something that might be commonplace in one culture could be deeply offensive in another culture. Such practices and attitudes should be identified beforehand with the help of local believers and team members should take the utmost care to ensure that they do not give offence. Team members should also find ways to interact with locals in a manner that is appreciated and valued in the host culture.

Fostering Independence and Self Sufficiency: One of the most significant challenges in the world of mission is the creation of dependence on outside entities (e.g. in the areas of leadership, re-sources or governance). This is a particularly relevant danger in situations where teams or missionaries from affluent societies minister in areas of significant deprivation. Guidelines on how unhealthy dependence can be avoided should be drawn up in consultation with local leaders and long term missionaries.

Supporting Long Term and Ongoing Efforts: Short term trips should be designed in such a way that they strengthen long term efforts to minister in the community. This means that we will strive to do nothing that will cause long term workers difficulty in the future and that programmes will be designed in consultation with those 'on the ground'.

Responsible Gift Giving: As Christians, we are called to share our resources with others. We recognise, however, that gift-giving in cross-cultural and/or materially deprived settings can be something of a minefield. Therefore, we commit to be sensitive in this area and to discuss the best way to channel monetary and other gifts with local leaders and long term workers.

