



Global Engagement and the Church

A collaborative project of the National
Church Ministry Initiative and the Applied
Research and Best Practice Initiative of the
Christian Alliance for Orphans

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Introduction

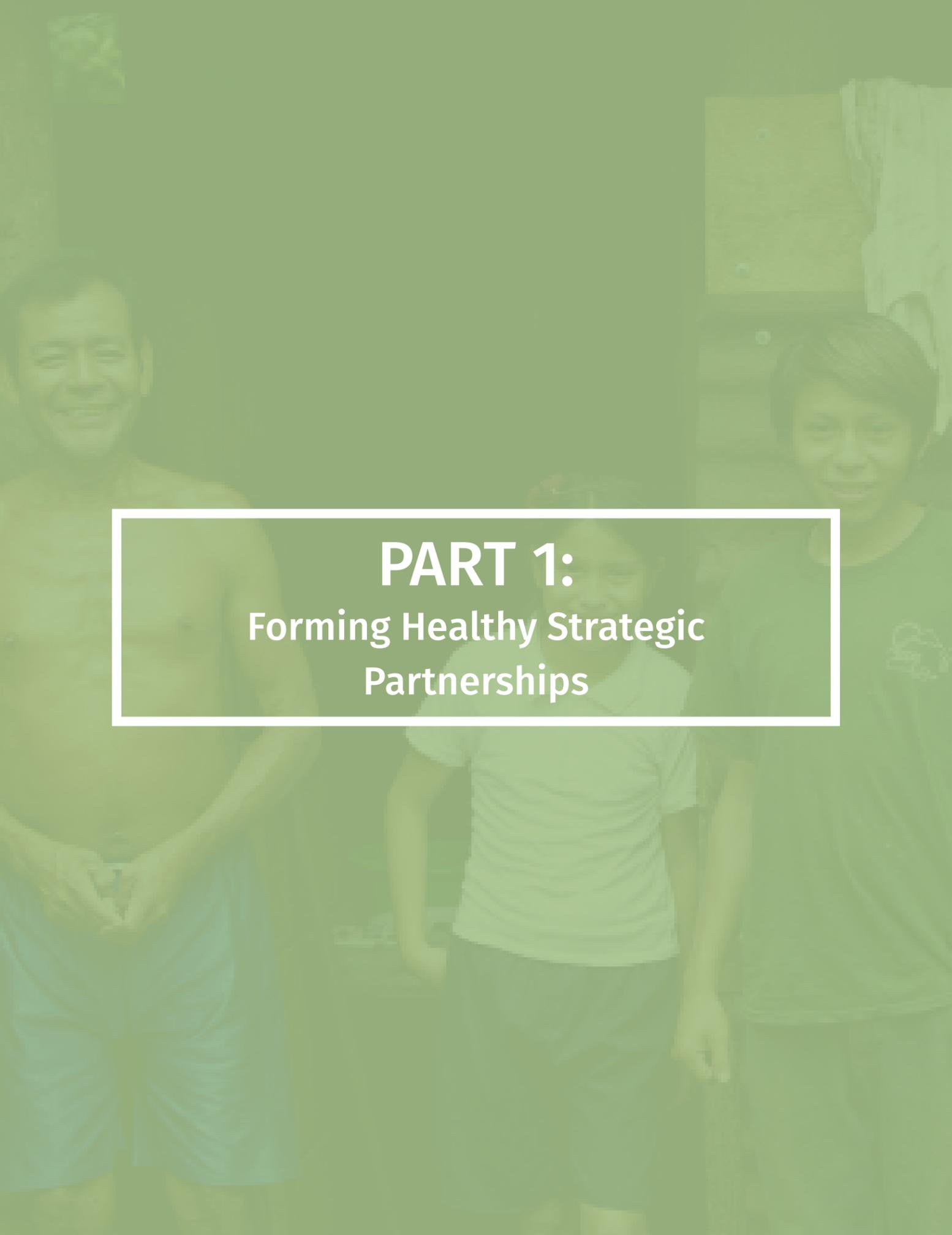
Impacting the world in significant, meaningful, Christ-honoring ways has always been a hallmark of the Christian church. Through local, domestic and global initiatives, God's people have historically led the way in compassionate awareness, advocacy and participation in matters of justice and mercy, renewal and restoration, hope and healing.

Participation in ministry to orphaned and vulnerable children (OVC) and short-term missions (STM) has grown significantly in recent years.¹ This trend warrants much celebration, as the Church is increasingly engaging in matters near to God's heart. Yet, it also demands much caution. Although good intentions underlie this movement, we must be aware of the common principles and pitfalls in order to effectively and sustainably form strategic partnerships, engage cross-culturally, and send volunteers to support and serve vulnerable children, families and communities around the world.

The purpose of this resource is to provide helpful information and tools for churches desiring to build an effective, sustainable and impactful global engagement strategy. It aims to provide a high-level introduction and overview of some key principles, practices and questions that are important to consider when developing global engagement strategies.

It is constructed around three primary elements: **1) Forming Healthy Strategic Partnerships**, **2) Prioritizing Child, Family and Community Well-being**, and **3) Participating in Short-term Missions Effectively and Ethically**. It then points to further resourcing that can be utilized to engage deeper in the most relevant or pressing topics for your team. Although every context is different, the ideas, principles and questions addressed here will help build a framework as you seek to optimize your global engagement strategy.

¹ Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability. (2016). 2016 State of Giving Report.



PART 1: **Forming Healthy Strategic Partnerships**

PART 1: Introduction

Your church needs more than just your church to effectively engage in the mission of God around the world. Identifying, vetting and formalizing strategic partnerships with organizations is a vital and necessary component of not only your global engagement strategy, but of your overall missions and outreach initiative as a church.

As you actively pursue establishing healthy strategic partnerships outside your church in order to optimize the execution of your vision inside your church, consider the following five principles and the subsequent essential practices associated with each. Finally, as a leader or leadership team, spend time processing through the suggested questions to help facilitate clarity, perspective and potential next steps for your ministry.

While preparing this resource our prayer is for you and your team to see God's favor poured out on your efforts at reaching the lost and strengthening believers worldwide.



Look to align your global investments with the broader vision and current engagements of your church.

Essential Practices

Pursue globally what you prioritize locally. Partner with organizations that share similar values, vision and goals.

Choose to work with partners who uphold the highest standards for quality care of children. Just like your church, organizational partners should be able to communicate the protocols they implement in order to uphold the highest standards of safety and quality of care for children.

Provide local applications to your global engagements. Don't simply live out certain values "over there," but provide opportunities for your church to translate that global perspective into their own local context "right here."

Questions to Consider

1. What values and priorities constitute the foundational culture of your church? In what ways do you want to see those mirrored in your potential partnership organizations?
2. Consider the protocols of security, monitoring and communication already in place for your children's ministry. What standards of quality of care for children should you be looking for in potential global partner organizations?
3. What are your primary strategic engagements globally? How can you build a bridge between "over there" and "right here" by facilitating a local application of those initiatives for your church? Does your potential partnership organization see value in, and perhaps provide resources for implementing some of these measures?



Ensure potential partner organizations uphold the highest ethical standards for quality of care and organizational integrity.

Essential Practices

Ensure partners are registered with local and national authorities. Partner with organizations that are accredited in the countries in which they operate.

Thoroughly assess potential partners for child-safe practices. Review official procedures and policies, and ask community members about their reputation and practices.

Gain clarity about a potential partner's financial practices. Determine where funding comes from and how it is used.

Review the qualifications of and training procedures for staff. Identify who is working in the particular roles your church will be most engaged with, primarily those implementing the ministry on the ground.

Questions to Consider

1. Do we have a clear understanding of things like child-safe practices, financial accountability and staff training procedures for our current partner organizations?
2. If our current partners are operating in ways that are not ethical or in accordance with evidence-based practice, how do we proceed? Where might we be able to empower them to improve their practices? What factors would be deal-breakers requiring an end to the partnership?
3. What internal processes can we put in place to ensure that all potential partner organizations, whether local, domestic or global, are vetted according to consistent measures and expectations? How do we measure the processes over time to ensure best practices are being maintained?



*How can we connect with what God is doing in other parts of the world? How can we learn to be good partners with Christians already in these places? How can we participate in what the church is already doing in these countries in effective ways?*²

² Dr. Brian Howell, an anthropologist at Wheaton College, in Christianity Today: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/january-february/better-partners.html>



Support and learn from organizations that prioritize long-term development of communities, not merely short-term dependency upon outside support.

Essential Practices

Give cash, material donations and other resources cautiously and under the guidance of local leaders. Use proper distribution and accountability channels to ensure resources are used as intended.

Prioritize partnering with ministries that multiply their impact by supporting families and communities. Long-term cultural transformation is sustained by the health of families and the spiritual, social and economic commerce of communities.

Learn ways you can support local leader development, increasing the sustainability of ministry. Build capacity in community and church leaders by connecting them to resources they might not have access to otherwise.

Questions to Consider

1. Are your current global engagement activities working to optimize what local partners are already doing, or are they using local partners to infuse your own objectives into a community?
2. In what ways are your current global partners actively engaged in strengthening families and building self-sustaining and self-sufficient commerce in local communities? How can you help them continue or expand this work?
3. What opportunities currently exist with your global partners to build capacity in local church and community leaders? Do they already have programs set up you can work through? If not, how can you work with them to establish some of those pipelines?

P4

Establish clear expectations for the partnership and mutually agreed upon roles and responsibilities.

Essential Practices

Communicate expectations in writing where possible to minimize the risk of miscommunication.

Be diligent in documenting the necessary details of your partnership, and be flexible as both parties learn and grow and change over time.

Communicate expectations and roles to all ministry participants from your church. Train, equip and prepare your people on how to best relate to and interact with the ministry partner.

Make the conversation about expectations and roles ongoing, revisiting it over time and across changes in ministry. Open lines of communication and transparency aid in the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of the partnership.

Questions to Consider

1. Do you have clearly defined roles, responsibilities and expectations between your church and your current ministry partner? If not, what steps can you take to mutually identify, agree upon and document them?
2. What mechanisms do you have in place to train, equip and prepare your people who will be most engaged with your ministry partner? Are they understanding the church's and organization's roles, responsibilities and expectations appropriately?
3. Do you feel it's time to revisit a conversation about roles and expectations with your current ministry partners? What things specifically do you feel need to be clarified and reinforced?
4. In vetting potential new partners, what questions might you ask before formalizing the relationship? Consider listing 5-7 essential questions, along with a general framework of the types of answers you would hope to receive from the partner organization.

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Elephant and Mouse were best friends. One day Elephant said, “Mouse, let’s have a party!” Animals gathered from far and near. They ate. They drank. They sang. And they danced. And nobody celebrated more and danced harder than Elephant. After the party was over, Elephant exclaimed, “Mouse, did you ever go to a better party? What a blast!” But Mouse did not answer. “Mouse, where are you?” Elephant called. He looked around for his friend, and then shrank back in horror. There at Elephant’s feet lay Mouse. His little body was ground into the dirt. He had been smashed by the big feet of his exuberant friend, Elephant.³

³ Miriam Adeney, “When the Elephant Dances, the Mouse May Die,” Short-Term Mission Today, inaugural edition, 2000, as reprinted in When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor ... And Yourself by Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert.



Learn from partners how you can empower them to meet needs within their community and context.

Essential Practices

Prioritize relationships over projects. Pursue a partnership that is relational (connected, supportive, friendly and mutually beneficial), not merely transactional (task driven, more contractual in nature).

Let the partners be the heroes of your shared ministry. Platform them in their communities by assuming more of a supporting role.

Follow the partner organization's lead for ways your church can support their local ministry efforts. The objective is to optimize what they do and assist in executing initiatives that are in the best interests of those they serve. Trust their wisdom, and the likelihood that they know the needs of their community best.

Questions to Consider

1. Do your current partnerships have more of a transactional or relational connection? What can you do to help facilitate a more connected, friendly partnership?
2. Do you feel comfortable following the lead of your current ministry partners? In what ways have you had to surrender your expectations and trust their wisdom? If not, what steps can you take to address this?
3. How can you help platform your ministry partners as the "heroes" in their communities? Is there anything you are currently doing that might be posturing your church as the hero? What steps can you take to assume more of a supporting role?

Resources on Healthy Strategic Partnerships

Journeys of Faith
(Faith to Action Initiative)

When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor...and Yourself
(Corbett, S. and Fikkert, B.)

Due Diligence Guidelines
(ACCI Missions & Relief)

Building Healthy Partnerships
(Compassion International)

PART 2: Introduction

Orphans and vulnerable children are often without the oversight and protection normally provided within a healthy family. As such, they are at greater risk for abuse⁴ and other forms of exploitation. When outsiders are permitted access to their “home” space, such as a residential care center, children are especially at-risk.

Scripture tells us all children have the right to be safe and protected.⁵ A core commitment of your church can be to care for vulnerable children by refusing to engage in any practices that could potentially harm and not help a child.

Both scripture⁶ and social science⁷ suggest children were intended to be raised in the context of loving and healthy families. Your church’s global engagement strategy should seek to support this model.

A healthy and secure family naturally provides the ingredients that are so integral to optimal child development. The vast majority of parents hope to raise their children well, but often lack the knowledge, resources or opportunities to do so. This can lead to children being placed unnecessarily in residential care or alternative care settings. Reinforcing family strengthening efforts is one helpful way your church can serve orphaned and vulnerable children and contribute to a long-term impact on their families and communities.

Attachment:

The emotional bond that forms between an infant and caregiver as a result of the caregiver consistently meeting the child’s needs over time. For orphans and vulnerable children, this process may not have occurred as ideal, so we need to be especially thoughtful of how we interact.

PART 2: Prioritize Child, Family and Community Well-being

4 Better Volunteering Better Care. (n.d.). International volunteering and child sexual abuse.

5 Matthew 18:6 “If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.” (NIV)

6 Psalm 68:6 “God sets the lonely in families, he leads out the prisoners with singing; but the rebellious live in a sunscorched land.” (NIV)

7 Faith to Action Initiative. (2014). Children, Orphanages, and Families: A Summary of Research to Help Guide Faith-Based Action.

P1

Make protecting children from harm your first priority.

Essential Practices

Ensure your church and any partners have a child protection policy that is implemented and reviewed on a regular basis with all staff and volunteers. This child protection policy is an integral part of training your church volunteers prior to interacting with children or families.

Establish reporting mechanisms that encourage individuals to report any suspected maltreatment of children. Communicate this process to all staff, volunteers and ministry partners in writing.

Thoroughly screen and have background checks conducted on all staff and volunteers who interact with children. Any concerning results prevent interaction with children, no exceptions. (The best way to ensure safety of children is to limit access to only trained professionals or screened staff – those who are necessary to the child’s care and support.)

All volunteer interaction with children should occur in the presence of the family or group. Under no circumstances should a volunteer and a child ever be alone.

Questions to Consider

1. Do we [and our partners] have and use a child protection policy? Is it reviewed regularly?
2. Do we have reporting mechanisms in place that encourage individuals to report suspected maltreatment?
3. How are we training and preparing our volunteers on appropriate standards of child and family interaction before allowing them to serve in those environments?
4. What is one immediate action step we need to take to ensure our top priority is protecting children from harm?

P2

Hold a vision for care within family as ideal.

Essential Practices

Empower parents to remain the primary caregivers for their children whenever possible. A healthy family context provides the love, nurture, stability, protection and care a child needs to optimize his/her development.

Partner with organizations committed to implementing practices that prioritize permanency in family-based care over long-term residential care.⁸ Pursue organizations that are engaged in a continuum of care, from support family-based alternatives, reunification, kinship care, foster care, and adoption.

Address the root causes of vulnerability, not merely the symptoms. Oftentimes, poverty, lack of childcare, or limited access to services such as education, healthcare, etc. are the reason children are placed in residential care.

Questions to Consider

1. Do our programs and partners engage by not only caring for OVC, but also in preventing unnecessary separation from family care through family strengthening?
2. Do our partners consider all family care options [biological family, kinship care, foster care, adoption] before placing a child in group care?
3. How might we encourage our partners to emphasize or move towards family care?

⁸ Transitioning Care Manual from F2A (<http://www.faithtoaction.org/resources/transitioning-to-care-for-children/>) The purpose is to assist churches and organizations that want to move from residential to family care for orphaned and vulnerable children.



Consider the quality of care we strive to provide in our own home with our children. Bluntly, we need to consider why we are okay with children in developing nations receiving a level of care we would never be okay with our children receiving. This isn't about amenities, but rather about family structure, permanency, bonding and attachment, meeting emotional needs, providing individualized attention, and ensuring we are doing nothing to compromise the safety and security of the children we are working to impact.



Ministry with orphaned and vulnerable children should serve to strengthen a child's relationship with his/her primary caregiver.

Essential Practices

Uphold the caregiver as the hero in a child's life, and be willing to take a supporting role. Seek ways to lift up and promote the child's caregiver, helping to further strengthen their bond.

Empower caregivers to provide emotional and material support to the children, in an effort to reinforce the long-term relationship. Vulnerable children often have special needs related to attachment. Our priority is to empower the relationships they have with caregivers over our own desire for connection.

Caregivers must feel empowered to set appropriate boundaries. They should feel free to say no to visits, and volunteers should be prepared to accept any limits introduced by the caregiver, even with no advance notice.

Limit a child's individual contact with visitors to preserve his/her ability to attach to caregivers. Consider outlining guidelines for interaction, such as never being alone with a child, only engaging children in the presence of and with permission from their primary caregivers, etc.

Questions to Consider

1. How might you respond if the situation were reversed? Instead of being a volunteer, imagine you are the caregiver for vulnerable children where well-intentioned teams from other countries routinely travel to your village to interact with the children for a week or two, and then leave. How does it shift your perspective of the visit? What concerns might you have? In light of these concerns, what practices within your current global engagement strategy might need to change?
2. One way to avoid the "revolving door" of caregivers in the lives of vulnerable children is to focus on supporting local caregivers—church and community members—so they can better provide the love and affection their children need. How would your church/ministry feel about participating in a short term trip if your efforts were focused more on supporting and equipping caregivers and less on interacting directly with children?
3. Does your current global partner provide opportunities to care for the primary caregivers of children? If not, in what ways can you encourage them to do so? If they are incapable, are you willing to find new strategic partners that can help your church be more effective at strengthening a child's relationship with his/her primary caregiver?



Learn how attachment and trauma affect vulnerable children, and ensure this factor is taken into consideration when planning your ministry.

Essential Practices

Both children and visitors need to know the parameters for acceptable behavior before interaction takes place – what they can say, how they can touch, how to say goodbye, etc. As much as is possible, train volunteers on culturally and relationally appropriate forms of interaction, communication and connection.

Visits should only take place with children three years of age and older. Younger children cannot understand why volunteers will be leaving.

Routines and intimate moments are for long-term caregivers only. All aspects of a child's personal routine (meal times, sleeping, etc.) should be facilitated by the primary caregiver.

Consider how often volunteers are coming and going; the repeated making and breaking of attachment bonds with successive volunteers is damaging. Consider not only the impact of your ministry volunteers, but also of any other volunteers who engage with the same children.

Encourage children to seek physical affection from their caregivers instead of volunteers. Prepare volunteers for how they will redirect children to their caregivers.

Provide trauma and attachment training to all staff and volunteers prior to interacting with vulnerable children. Help them to consider the long-term effects of their interaction with children and families.

Questions to Consider

1. How does learning more about the developmental needs of children—especially their needs for healthy connection and attachment—shift your understanding of what it means to truly care for orphans and vulnerable children?
2. In what ways would a greater understanding of trauma, attachment and the developmental needs of children impact your interaction and involvement on short-term mission trips? How will it affect the way you prepare and train volunteers?
3. What might you, your church, or your organization add to your training as a result of the suggestions above? What changes could you make to maximize the effectiveness of your training in preparing your participants to learn and serve cross-culturally? What gaps do you have in your current training?

P5

Consider the lasting impact sharing photos or stories could have on a life of a child.

Essential Practices

Images or stories featuring orphans and vulnerable children should only be shared with great caution. At a minimum, permission of the child and his/her caregiver is requisite.

All in-person boundaries (i.e. never being alone with a child) extend to social media and any contact after a trip. No contact information should be exchanged with children or youth.

Only post or share what you would say if the child or caregiver were present. Share only those images and stories that display dignity.

In order to foster healthy boundaries, consider removing distractions by not allowing phones and/or cameras for part of the trip (or the entire trip). One or two individuals could be designated to take photos while the rest of the team focuses on other activities.

Questions to Consider

1. What policies might you implement for all volunteers participating in any ministry activity (local or global) that involves engaging with orphaned and vulnerable children?
2. Consider how this draws well-intentioned but self-focused motives out of ministry volunteers. How can you help them identify their own motives and expectations? Perhaps asking them to answer questions like, "Would I still want to go on this trip, or participate in this ministry, if I couldn't take photographs? If I couldn't directly interact with children the way I want to?"
3. What structures can be put in place within your ministry to orphaned and vulnerable children that maximizes the opportunities volunteers have to serve, while at the same time ensuring the whole experience is being well-documented by capturing photos, stories, etc? Examples: have a designated photographer on each trip; enlist a "story team" to document impactful events, interactions and experiences at the end of each day.

Consider the measures we take to protect the privacy of our own children at home. Bluntly, we need to consider why we are okay with pictures and stories of children in developing nations being shared, while we would never be okay with a stranger taking pictures of our child and sharing them on social media.

Resources for Child Well-being

Child Protection Webinar and Resource Guide
(CAFO)

A Continuum of Care for Orphans and Vulnerable Children
(Faith to Action Initiative)

Attachment: Why It Matters
[00:36-2:01] (Empowered to Connect)

Bonding and Attachment in Maltreated Children
(Child Trauma Academy)

Protecting Vulnerable Children: Wise and Honoring Representations of Children in Media
(CAFO)

Transitioning to Family Care for Children and A Guidance Manual and Toolkit
(Faith to Action Initiative)

PART 3: **Participating in Short-term Missions** **Ethically and Effectively**

PART 3: Introduction

Short-term mission trips have become one of the most popular methods for the western Church to engage globally. Approximately 2 million Christians travel on international short-term mission trips each year.⁹

While trip participants undoubtedly have good intentions and hope to affect the lives of orphans and vulnerable children in positive ways, short-term visits have the potential to cause more harm than good if not approached carefully. When considered in the context of what it means to biblically care for the hurting,¹⁰ poor,¹¹ and oppressed,¹² short-term mission trips should be conducted with the utmost humility, clarity and thoughtfulness to benefit those we seek to serve.

With the right structure in place, short-term missions can produce long-lasting good. However, good intentions are not sufficient to carry us into this work or sustain the effects long-term. Scripture says we must pursue wisdom¹³ and knowledge¹⁴ over and above good intentions. It is only through a paradigm of thoughtful consideration, learning, planning and implementing that the benefits of short-term missions can overcome the potential pitfalls and obstacles.

⁹ Howell, B.M. (2012). *Short-term mission: An Ethnography of Christian Travel Narrative and Experience*. Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Academic.

¹⁰ 2 Corinthians 1:3-5- "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ." (NIV)

¹¹ Proverbs 14:31- "Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God." (NIV)

¹² Zechariah 7:10 "Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor. Do not plot evil against each other." (NIV)

¹³ Proverbs 4:7 "The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding." (NIV)

¹⁴ Proverbs 19:2 "Desire without knowledge is not good- how much more will hasty feet miss the way!" (NIV)

In order to move towards a healthy and effective use of STM in your church's global engagement strategy, some key questions for consideration include:

- What do you hope your participants will gain by engaging in STM?
- What long-term effects do you desire for your trip participants and your organization partners? What steps should be taken to achieve those goals?
- Consider the range of motives people might have for participating in a mission trip. What are some of the positive motivations? What are some of the negative or mixed motivations?

In an effort to establish a framework for effective and ethical, 400 global mission leaders developed the Standards of Excellence in Short-term Missions.¹⁵ These include:

- 1. God-Centeredness:** An excellent short-term mission seeks first God's glory and his kingdom.
- 2. Empowering Partnerships:** An excellent short-term mission establishes healthy, interdependent, on-going relationships between sending and receiving partners.
- 3. Mutual Design:** An excellent short-term mission collaboratively plans each specific outreach for the benefit of all participants.
- 4. Comprehensive Administration:** An excellent short-term mission exhibits integrity through reliable set-up and through administration over all participants.
- 5. Qualified Leadership:** An excellent short-term mission screens, trains and develops capable leadership for all participants.
- 6. Appropriate Training:** An excellent short-term mission prepares and equips all participants for the mutually designed outreach.
- 7. Thorough Follow Through:** An excellent short-term mission assures evaluation, debriefing and appropriate follow-through for all participants.

Addressing these and others standards of practice will go a long way towards laying the foundation for the most effective use of STM in your church's global engagement strategy.

¹⁵ Standards of Excellence in Short-term Mission. (n.d.) The 7 standards.



Establish appropriate expectations between volunteers, team leaders and hosts prior to the trip.

Essential Practices

Assist volunteers in identifying their motivations and expectations prior to the trip, and modifying them to fit the framework of what is actually healthy and helpful. Ensure everyone knows and agrees to why they are going and what the commitment is before, during and after a trip.

Have pre-field conversations with participants and hosts about realistic goals for the trip. Identify what would make it a "win." What are the most ideal, yet achievable outcomes?

Communicate in writing with host partners prior to the trip. Establish the agenda, activities and logistics that would be most helpful for them.

Questions to Consider

1. What processes do you currently have in place for vetting the motivations and expectations of potential trip participants? What measures might you add to ensure a shared vision and commitment for the trip among all participants?
2. Are volunteers and host partners clear on the specific objectives of the trip? How are you planning activities, schedules and other logistics of the trip around those specific objectives? Are there any things in your current trip structure that do not directly feed into accomplishing those specific objectives? What adjustments might need to be made?
3. How are your trips planned – according to what works best for you team or to what works best for your host partner? What measures can you take to specifically tailor agenda, activities and logistics to the needs of your host partner?

What's Your Motivation? Asking incisive questions can help participants explore their motivations and expectations. Examples could include:

- Why are you going on this trip?
- What is your understanding of your role as a leader or participant?
- What activities do you hope to participate in?
- What do you hope to gain from this trip?
- What do you hope to contribute to the host community?

P2

Educate volunteers regarding culture, poverty, charity and care for orphans and vulnerable children.

Essential Practices

Include local leaders in the development and teaching of training materials. They are the experts on local culture and systems, as well as long-term ministry efforts.

Training needs to occur pre-field and on-field prior to any interaction with children. What kinds of training meetings can you offer for trip participants prior to departure? Are these meetings mandatory for those wanting to participate in a STM? What on-field training is provided once your team is in country? Does your partner organization provide opportunities to educate and encourage trip participants prior to engaging in trip activities?

It is important to communicate that a short-term trip is not meant to fix or fund anything, or to fill a visitor's emotional needs. It is important that volunteers understand there is a cost to their presence, not an unmitigated benefit.

Cash and gifts need to be considered with caution in order to avoid creating a dependency. All resources — time, money and material items should go to furthering the impact of long-term ministry and should be cleared with local leadership in advance of a trip. Give gifts that benefit a family or ministry, and not just one child.

Questions to Consider

1. Does your pre-trip training for volunteers include insights and principles from local leaders in the regions where you'll be serving? If not, what steps can you take to include the knowledge they have of their own culture, systems and communities?
2. What safeguards do you have in place to ensure all gifts are exchanged through proper channels?
3. In what ways might understanding more about poverty and charity impact your role as a participant on short-term mission trips? How will it effect the way you train and prepare volunteers ahead of time?

P3

Prioritize listening, learning and building relationships over accomplishing tasks.

Essential Practices

Consider reframing the trip as a service-learning trip or an advocacy trip, to communicate a focus on learning before serving. Emphasize a commitment to supporting current ministry, as opposed to executing new ideas from visitors.

Short-term mission trips are best utilized in the context of ongoing partnership. Ensure your STM trips are either facilitating new long-term relationships or are serving as an opportunity to continue building trust and friendship with long-term partners.

Reframe the purpose of the trip for potential participants. Present the well-being of local children and families as the focus for both the short-term and long-term goal for your mission teams.

Finally, should not every trip be framed in terms of the larger Missio Dei, the whole mission of God? This would permit inclusion of relationship-building activities, conversations with local leaders, and time spent listening to those in the field, including long-term missionaries. Such reconceptualization, rather than detracting, would greatly enhance the "real" work of short-term mission teams.

-Dr. Brian Howell

Questions to Consider

1. How would you feel if your team accomplished no great tasks, but instead spent your time listening and learning? How would potential STM participants from your church feel?
2. How can you train your volunteers to use what they learn on the STM for post-trip ministry, like awareness-building, advocacy, education, etc.? What priority should listening and learning have in preparing participants for post-trip ministry?
3. How does your current STM model reinforce the priorities of listening and learning? In what way is it more task oriented? Are there any adjustments that can be made to your current structure to ensure trips are more about “learning” than they are about “doing”?

How would you and your trip participants feel if your team achieved no tangible outcomes?

This question will get to the heart of a volunteer’s motivation and expectations. Is this trip a means of personal fulfillment or a way to truly serve others? Doing what we want and doing what’s needed for the good of others are not the same thing.

As you consider your STM strategy, it is important to keep these “motivation-exposing” scenarios in front of potential participants. Always ensure your church’s focus is on the long-term benefits of the host community, rather than personal or team goals and desires.



Design elements of the trip around what is best for the long-term development of children, families, and the community, not the short-term experience of the visitors.

Essential Practices

Remember we serve people, not projects. Ensure children and families never become the means to an end for achieving trip goals or providing participants with a new life experience.

Rather than limiting interaction to one family or program, consider activities that benefit the entire community. For example: camps, clinics, conferences and skill-development can educate and support families, as well as integrate children into the community.

Align trip objectives with on-going local ministry. The most impactful way to temporarily care for a vulnerable child is to build up the family and community that care for them long-term.

Whenever possible, use the unique skills of the team, instead of engaging visitors in work that can be done by community members who need employment. Visitors should not engage in skills-based activities (such as teaching or medical care) in which they are not trained. Any activity should only be undertaken as part of a long-term ministry plan.

Questions to Consider

1. How does your STM strategy currently engage those in positions of power and authority who can create sustainable solutions? In what ways can your focus remain on serving ground level needs while at the same time encouraging and empowering leaders in those roles?
2. Are any of your current STM activities available to the broader community you are serving in? If not, how can you expand what you are presently doing beyond a single family or facility?
3. Are you currently engaged in tasks (i.e. construction) that could be completed by local workers? Consider the economic impact on those workers, their families and the community. What changes, if any, do you need to make to your current STM planning in order to ensure you are being as helpful as you can be?



Measure effectiveness of the trip based on long-term impact for both the participants and host community members.

Essential Practices

Prioritize long-term impact, not short-term experience. The goal is to empower a community to thrive without you, not create mechanisms within a community that depend on you.

Often, the most powerful outcomes of a STM occur after the participant returns home. Build a bridge in your STM strategy that provides local applications to your global interactions.

Evaluation, of both programs and volunteers, has the potential to help individuals, teams and organizations learn and develop as they seek to improve care for orphans and vulnerable children. Learning from the feedback after each trip should be used to improve and prepare for future trips.

Questions to Consider

1. How are the activities and relational interactions of the trip resourcing members of the community? Does your involvement leave them empowered without you or dependent upon you? Are the volunteers engaging as part of a cohesive, long-term ministry plan with a vision that stretches beyond two weeks or a month overseas?
2. As you engage volunteers in the spiritual, physical, educational and emotional needs of communities globally, how can they participate in meeting some of those same needs locally within your own context? What “bridge” can you build between what you are doing “over there” as a church and what you are doing “right here”? Examples of a “bridge” might include engaging in mentoring programs, addressing homelessness in your city, foster care, etc.
3. What evaluation and “debriefing” opportunities have you created to measure effectiveness, learn from experiences and improve upon any future STM engagements?

Resources on Short-Term Missions

The 7 Standards
(Standards of Excellence in Short-Term Mission)

Short-Term Missions: Redefining Success
(The Chalmers Center)

Protecting Children in Short-Term Missions
(ACCI Missions & Relief)

What It's Really Like to Grow Up in an "Orphanage" in Kenya
(Ucembe, S.)

Serving with Eyes Wide Open: Doing Short-Term Missions with Cultural Intelligence
(David Livermore)

Solving Poverty is Rocket Science

Conclusion

Scripture clearly indicates the value of children,¹⁶ the responsibility of caring for the marginalized,¹⁷ and the duty of the Church to defend the rights of vulnerable children, families and communities around the world.¹⁸ As Christians respond to this call, it is vital we do so with wisdom-guided practices, humility and caution.

It is easy to become overwhelmed with the difficulties orphans and vulnerable children face, and it is natural to want to take action — but how we engage can make a world of difference. Although our intentions are good, uninformed action may inadvertently harm the very children, families and communities we aim to serve.

As the Church stands ready to be the solution God intends it to be, we must do so with a deep

conviction and shared commitment to ensuring our responses to the needs around us will contribute to real and lasting change. Forming strong strategic partnerships, prioritizing child, family and community well-being, and ensuring any short term missions engagements are handled effectively and ethically are of the utmost importance in working to produce long-standing change and positive outcomes.

Your church has the capacity to not only affect change in the lives of vulnerable and orphaned children, their families and their communities, but also to participate in the privileged call to let the principles and practices of your ministry be a light that reflects the person of God for all to see.¹⁹ This is the highest aim of your global engagement strategy.

¹⁶ Psalm 127:3 "Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him." (NIV)

¹⁷ 1 John 3:17-18 "If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth." (NIV)

¹⁸ Isaiah 1:17 "Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow." (NIV)

¹⁹ Matthew 5:16 "...let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." (NIV)