

HOW TO PUT TOGETHER SHORT-TERM MISSIONS TRIPS





Laurin Bell's first short-term mission experience came as a freshman in college, working to clean up damage in South Carolina neighborhoods ravaged by floods.

Later, she worked in Houston, Texas, in hurricane disaster relief, then served six weeks with Send Relief's Appalachian Ministry Center in Ashland, Kentucky and for the Missions Chair for her Baptist Campus Ministry.

Her campus ministry work allowed her to match students with multiple local missions opportunities.

Nancy Ward went on her first short-term mission trip at 63 years old. Retired from her career as a school dietitian, she heard about the devastation after Hurricane Katrina and found she could work with those preparing the food to deliver to hurricane victims.

She has continued to participate in short-term mission trips and local missions, using her gifts and work experiences. Her work through short-term mission trips has helped her be more open to opportunities in her own community.¹

Both Laurin and Nancy have used their mission experiences to continue to be involved in caring for others locally and nationally.

It is never too early or too late to get involved in missions. All of us have the potential to be used by God on a mission field through short-term mission trips, and then back home as we use those newly acquired skills and passions in our own communities to open up doors to share the gospel. Short-term mission trips will allow you to serve others in your local context or another city and motivate those serving to live their lives on mission in a practical ways.

¹ Nancy Ward, interviewed by the author, April 23, 2019.



Short-Term Mission Trips in the United States

Participation in short-term mission trips in America has grown significantly over the past 20 years.

- In 2002, studies showed that “29% of all 13-to-17-year-olds in the United States had traveled at least once on a mission project.
- Three years later, 41% of 15-to-20-year-olds had done so.”² Adults have gotten involved as well.
- According to one study, over 1.6 million adults averaged eight days of ministry in 2005 at a total cost of \$2.4 billion. “That is more money than the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of more than 20 countries.”³

Researcher Robert Wuthnow’s findings suggest that over 2.4 million Americans went on short-term mission trips in 2004, while 1.6 million Americans went overseas on mission trips during 2005.⁴ About 60% of those who participate in short-term mission trips go to missionaries they already know or that the church has a relationship with.⁵

The bottom line is this:

*You, and your church have the opportunity and the resources to go
and make a difference in the name of Jesus Christ.*

² Darren Carlson, *Celebrating the Short-Term Missions Boom*, June 10, 2012; available from TheGospelCoalition.org at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/celebrating-the-short-term-missions-boom/>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ *Research and Statistics*.

⁵ *Research and Statistics*.

Strategically Considering Ministry Opportunities

Take the next step by enlisting a small group of people within your congregation to assess ministry opportunities by working through the following questions:

- **Who in your church is passionate and equipped to lead or participate in short-term mission trips?** Consider those who have participated in missions in the past. Also consider children's ministry workers, parents, families, teenagers or youth groups, Sunday school classes, and senior adults.
- **What resources has God given your church to support short-term mission trips?** Consider missions offerings, grants and those with the gift of couponing and other financial resources.

The questions above can lead your church to determine whether or not:

1. There is a desire within the congregation to meet this need
2. There are resources of people and money to meet this need
3. This ministry is sustainable over time
4. You feel God leading in this direction as a congregation





The Impact of Short-Term Missions

Colleen Smith serves as a missionary in Baltimore's inner city and she depends on mission teams coming into her area of the city during the summer.

One of the best collaborative experiences she's witnessed was through a church team from Knoxville, Tennessee. The team was led by a young youth pastor, and was filled with kind, gentle and Spirit-filled teenagers. During the week, these middle-class teenagers did a bedroom makeover for a young girl they did not know. Daily, these teens worked to renovate a house filled with bugs and mice — living and dead — and redid a bedroom that had no furniture in it.

They transformed this infested home to create a safe sanctuary for a girl who otherwise wouldn't have had one. Without a doubt, she now knows that people care about her and that God loves her.

What makes this experience so remarkable for Colleen is that it has become an ongoing relationship between the group, her community and her. The church returns every other year to show God's love for inner city Baltimore and to provide ongoing support for Colleen.⁶

⁶ Colleen Smith, Interview with author, April 5, 2019.

Steps For Preparing a Short-Term Missions Trip

Use these steps as a guide as you get started:

1. Begin with, and cover, the entire process in prayer.

- Pray about the motives behind the trip.
- Pray that God will show you what He is calling your church to do and the place He is preparing for you to go.
- Pray that God will show you how to develop a long-term, intentional relationship with the missionary or organization you'll be working with that you can continue to foster when you leave.



The role of prayer in preparing for, participating in and after completing the short-term mission trip cannot be overstated.

2. Determine where the team will go and the work they will do.

- Develop a relationship with a missionary or organization with which to partner. If you are searching for a missionary with whom you can work, try one of these options:
 - Visit sendrelief.org/trips for a listing of opportunities.
 - Ask your congregation for connections with those serving in missional roles who could use short-term mission support.
 - Contact your local Director of Missions for names of people in churches and ministries in other states with short-term mission needs.
 - Contact local missionaries in ministries you already work with for names of those serving in similar ministries throughout the United States.
 - Search social media to look for ministries and missionaries your church could support.
- After a partner relationship has been established, begin planning what role your mission team could fill. Discuss the needs the missionary has and review the resources within the church (both personnel and financial resources) that can meet these needs. Be flexible and try not to come in with an agenda.

3. Take time to learn about the culture of where you will be serving.

- Get to know the missionary you'll be working with, the neighborhood or area you'll be serving and the culture of the community in which your team will spend its time. It is vitally important to take time to discover and understand the unique needs within the potential missions site.
- * If possible, explore the physical community, listen to and learn from people living and working in the area and seek God's guidance by prayer-driving and prayer-walking the neighborhood.
- * If you are unable to travel to the site, interview the missionary you'll be working with to discover the needs of the community. To learn more about the community you'll be serving, ask someone from the ministry these questions:
 - What is the history of the area?
 - What role does the local government play in the lives of those living in the community?
 - What other ministries or service projects are being done in the community?
 - What is the priority ministry need that short-term mission teams can meet in the area?
 - When is the best time to plan a short-term mission trip to that area?

Use this information in budget planning and in preparing your team members for their assignments on the field





4. Set a budget for the trip using these procedures:

- Determine round-trip transportation costs:
 - When flying, consider the cost of airplane tickets, airport parking and baggage fees.
 - If renting a van, consider rental cost, gas, tolls, on-location parking costs and auto insurance.
 - If using a church van or personal vehicle, consider gas, tolls, on-location parking costs, auto insurance and liability issues.
- Determine on-location expenses:
 - Lodging costs
 - Daily food costs (water, drinks, snacks, breakfasts, lunches, dinners and tips)
 - Bus, subway and taxi/ride-share expenses
- Determine cost of travel insurance for each participant that covers travel cancellations, emergency medical costs and lost luggage.
- Determine cost of supplies and materials the team will need while on location to complete its ministry assignment(s).
- Determine other financial resources and materials that are available to the mission team, such as: donations, grants or missions giving that has been set aside for the trip.
- Calculate trip cost as follows:
 - List total budget number: _____ .00
 - Subtract any outside resources - _____ .00
 - List new working total Total = _____
 - Add ten percent to the total budget for any unplanned or emergency costs. + _____
 - Adjusted final budget Total = _____
 - Divide the adjusted budget by the number of participants to arrive at cost per each member ÷ _____
 - Final total cost per participant Final Cost = _____

Create a schedule for payments to be made for the mission trip to give to team members.

5. Schedule an information meeting for potential team members to share information about the trip.

- Share information about the trip:
 - A short-term mission trip is not a travel excursion or a vacation, but an opportunity to engage in a mission experience and to learn how to continue to do missions in their own community.
 - It is wise to have team members complete an application and a signed commitment to participate, as well as provide a completed and signed insurance waiver which you will provide. *To be safe, consult your lawyer for the laws within your state that guide this process. Most likely, you'll be going outside your own state, so make sure the waiver is legal in the destination as well.*
 - Team members will be responsible for participating in fund raising for the trip.
 - NOTE: Make sure you've made decisions in advance about the age of participants and how to handle those under the age of 18 who want to participate. Many churches require a parent or other family member to accompany a teen under the age of 18. Regardless of the age of participants, you'll want to have mission assignments that match the skills and physical abilities of the signed participants.
 - Discuss possible dates for the trip and share trip details (transportation, housing, food, assignments and costs).
- Share guidelines for potential team members, so expectations of team members will be clearly understood *before* any commitment is made.
 - Short-term mission trips can be physically demanding and will require hard work and, often, living in less than ideal situations. Understand that plans can change on the field and be prepared to embrace the changes.
 - Distribute a covenant of expectations that team members will be asked to sign that includes: the expectation of working well with others, the expectation of being positive throughout the trip, regardless of what happens, the expectation of listening to the people on the mission field more than talking to them and the expectation to follow guidelines given by missionaries or others on the mission field.
 - Explain that the team will have the opportunity to impact the mission area either positively or negatively. The actions of the team and individuals on the team will be remembered long after the short-term mission team has left. It is important that team members go into a mission area with a desire to get to know the residents, rather than an attempt to convince residents that their politics, beliefs or lifestyles are wrong.
- Share what potential team members need to do to sign up as a participant:
 - Provide a list of due dates for:
 - Trip sign-up and the application to be turned in
 - Schedule for trip payments
 - Interviews, if required
 - Trip training/prayer meeting
 - Trip packing day for materials and supplies



Short-Term Mission Trip Planning Check List

The steps outlined above are time sensitive. Use this guideline to keep your preparation moving:



Twelve months before departure:

- Confirm mission trip dates and details with on-site missionaries and hosts.
- Create your budget.
- Announce trip to church.
- Schedule trip information meeting.
- Set deadline for trip application for participants.
- Begin fundraising and mailing support letters to church members, family members, and others.
- Pray. (Ongoing!)



Nine to six months before departure:

- After some fundraising, you will have a better idea of what the out-of-pocket cost of the trip will be. Inform team members of the total cost of their trip and what they will need to raise or pay. Set fundraising goals for each team member.
- Purchase airline tickets or make other transportation arrangements.
- Collect all signed paperwork, including insurance waivers and insurance information, for each team member.
- Collect contact information for team members and team member families, so they can be updated while team is away.
- Purchase travel protection insurance.
- Make itinerary for the trip.
- Begin team meetings and training.
- Assess fundraising plan, and adjust if necessary.
- Update congregation.
- Pray. (Ongoing!)





Three months before departure:

- Check on baggage regulations with the airline.
- Confirm any cultural guidelines in the mission field that would impact how the team dresses on-site. Examples could include wearing no t-shirts with brand slogans, wearing closed-toe shoes for work sites, or bringing clothes that can be messed up/ruined during work.
- Distribute packing lists to team members to include needs for work clothes, worship clothes and weather.
- Pray. (Ongoing!)

Sample Packing List:

Supplies (as requested by missionaries)

Clothes

- Pants (slacks/khakis for services: work pants if applicable)
- Dresses/skirts for ladies if required by cultural expectations. (Check with local ministries on possible expectations.)
- Shirts (Dress shirts for service; work shirts if applicable)
- Light Cover Up (packable raincoats, long sleeve dry fit shirt)
- Underwear

- Socks
- Shoes (multiple: work, play, dress)
- Poncho
- Packing Cubes/Laundry bags

Toiletries

- Basic daily needs: deodorant, soap, shampoo, toothbrush, toothpaste
- Leakproof travel bottles
- Razor/shaving cream
- Feminine needs
- Comb/Brush

Medical

- Insurance Cards
- Prescriptions

- Vitamins and Pro-Biotics
- Pain relievers
- Travel first aid kit
- Bug repellent
- Sunscreen

Miscellaneous

- Bible
- Journal
- Cash
- Flashlight/Headlamp
- Day pack
- Headphones
- Travel pillow, mask and ear plugs
- Umbrella
- Snacks
- Sleeping Bag
- Pillow

- Finalize fundraising efforts.
- Plan for post-trip follow up and debriefing.
- Organize and provide required training sessions regarding rules, neighborhood culture and ministry activities. Include fellowship opportunities.
- Arrange airport ground transportation each way or confirm van rentals.

- Confirm material supply lists with on-site missionaries.
- Pray. (Ongoing!)



One Month Before Departure

- Create a communication plan.
- Make sure all paperwork has been signed and is in order.
- Plan post trip follow-up/debriefing (ongoing).
- Update Congregation.
- Pray. (Ongoing!)



One Week Before Departure:

- Conduct team meeting and packing party.
- Pray. (Ongoing!)



One Month After the Trip

- Post-trip follow-up and debriefing meeting.
- Share about the trip with the congregation.
- Write thank you notes for host, donors and others who provided assistance along the way.
- Discuss a time for team to serve together locally.
- Pray!



Final Tips From On-Site Missionaries

Missionary Colleen Smith knows the importance of presenting the challenges and potential dangers of working in inner city Baltimore with her short term mission teams, so she is very honest in presenting the challenges they may encounter while still making them feel confident in their decision to choose to work alongside her.

In one case, a team member chose not to heed caution and decided to disregard the building curfew. That night he made decisions that not only put himself in danger but also the other teams that were visiting and could have potentially harmed the relationship Colleen and her ministry had built with the neighborhood she serves. Listen to the missionaries, follow their guidelines and understand that the precautions and rules that are put in place are to protect all parties. Remember that your team is there to reflect the glory of God on that mission field. There's no room for personal agendas or egos while your team is on the field.

Colleen also points out that volunteers should “really consider that as you serve, some churches have the means to become financial partners, others can partner in prayer, while others are just a place of support for the missionary or maybe an opportunity to visit their church for rest or to share their work.”⁷

Guatemalan missionary Michelle Acker Perez tells mission volunteers that they are not on the field to be a hero, but a long-term partner in ministry. She also reminds them that poverty on the field can look different than they expect, and can include mental poverty, physical poverty, spiritual poverty and systemic poverty. She encourages her volunteers to allow learning to take place through reciprocal relationships by sharing their own stories with those they encounter on the field.⁸

WHAT NEXT?

This is your opportunity to begin a short-term mission trip ministry that will have life-changing impact on your church, individual team members, on-site missionaries and the people on the mission field. Prayerfully consider if God is leading you forward in this process.

⁷ Colleen Smith.

⁸ Michelle Acker Perez, “Things No One Tells You About Going on Short-Term Mission Trips,” May 9, 2016, [relevantmagazine.com](https://relevantmagazine.com/current16/things-no-one-tells-you-about-going-short-term-mission-trips/); available at <https://relevantmagazine.com/current16/things-no-one-tells-you-about-going-short-term-mission-trips/>.



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