



Mission Trip
Follow-Up:

7 STEPS

to Lasting Impact



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Your next mission trip can impact more than you realize.

Each time your church participates in a mission trip, it invests significant resources.

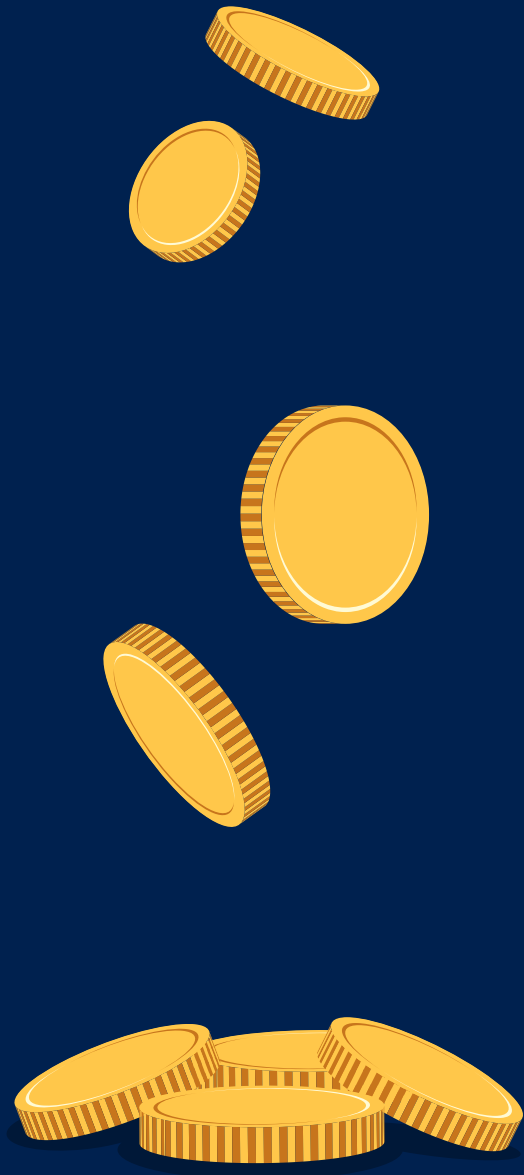
From finances to time and the expertise of those sent, every trip represents a meaningful commitment to serve in another country (or another community in the same country).

You are responsible for making the most of every investment you've made.

That's what Jesus tells us in the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30). You know the story. A man goes on a journey. While he is gone, he entrusts his servants with "talents" based on their abilities. Two of those servants invest what he has given and double their master's investment. The third servant buries his treasure and makes nothing for his master while he is gone.

Jesus makes it clear. The two servants who doubled their master's investment get a "well done," and the other servant is castigated.

God wants us to make the most of everything he has given us. That includes the time and resources we're putting into mission trips.



The Traditional Approach vs. Visionary Impact

Most mission trips focus on short-term goals. You're trying to meet needs that are right in front of your team. You want to share the gospel with those you meet. You want to see the members of your team grow in faithfulness.

But once the team returns home, we tend to move on to what's next: Sunday's worship service, the ministry project down the street, or the new program we plan to start.

When we do that, we're acting like the servant who buried his talent. Sure, we're not losing anything. We're still making an impact while we're on the trip. But we're not making an investment in the future of our church and the future of the mission field we're serving.

There is a better way. We can multiply our impact both at home and abroad through a coordinated follow-up strategy after every mission trip. That'll create a legacy of transformation that won't stop at the end of the trip.

Empowering Participants for Lasting Growth

Maybe the most important impact of every short-term trip happens in the lives of participants. God does the remarkable when we step out in faith and serve Jesus, even when we're afraid. That happens all the time when we participate in mission trips.

Yet without faithful follow up, these faith-filled steps your congregants took on the mission field won't take permanent root in the lives of participants.

For example, maybe you have someone on your trip who shared their faith in Jesus with someone for the first time. Despite fear and uncertainty, this participant stepped out in faith to share the good news. That's a great first step. But without follow-up, it may be the last time he or she shares her faith. That growth could stall.

Your goal is to make disciples. That goal isn't just for the mission field. It's for participants as well. Making disciples means you help that participant who has just shared Jesus make it a regular habit.

That's part one of what the follow-up strategy in this guide will help you to do.

Creating Lasting Impact in the Target Community

However, the influence of your church's upcoming mission trip should extend beyond just your church members. You want to make a difference in the community you're serving. That doesn't need to stop when you get back on the plane to fly home.

We live in a day when our partnership doesn't have to end when our physical presence does. To do this, developing long-term relationships is the key.

This guide will help you nurture those relationships long after your trip is over.

A Simple 7-Part Plan

You can't have the kind of long-term transformation in the lives of people without a plan. It doesn't just happen.

That's why this guide leads you through a unique seven-part plan to make sure the impact of your missions trip doesn't end when you get back to your church.

Step 1: Debrief and Reflect

Step 2: Maintain Communication with Mission Partners

Step 3: Foster Ongoing Growth in Participants

Step 4: Equip Participants for Local Ministry

Step 5: Share the Mission Story with the Church

Step 6: Evaluate and Improve Future Missions

Step 7: Turn the Mission Trip into a Missional Lifestyle

These seven steps aren't difficult. You won't need to break the bank. It won't overrun your schedule. By building a regular cadence with these steps, you'll make sure your impact doesn't stop.

STEP 1

Debrief and Reflect (Within 2 Weeks of Returning)

A structured time of debriefing will help your mission trip participants process all that God did in their lives during this mission trip. It'll also help you with everything else you're doing to extend the impact of the trip. Every other step of this process depends upon having an effective debriefing time shortly after your return. Most importantly, it's your chance to communicate that the work isn't over. It's hard to overestimate how crucial this meeting is.

Aim for a 1.5- to 2-hour meeting. Set it long before you leave for the trip. Help people understand how important (how much fun!) the debriefing time will be as soon as you introduce it to your team. To ensure people come, consider adding a meal (potentially related to the location of your trip).

Have writing utensils and paper available for people to take notes of what they're processing. Try to let people sit in small groups of 2-4 people. You want to give people an opportunity to talk and discuss the questions you'll ask.

Also, ask someone to keep track of corporate decisions/insights. For example, if in the process of your discussion, you realize the church needs to consider a specific commitment to the partner community you're engaging; you need someone to note that so you can follow up.

STEP 1

Here's a basic structure for the meeting.
See the appendix for questions to include.

- Welcome & Prayer (5 minutes) -**
Ask God to open your eyes to everything he wants to show you and your team about the mission trip experience.
- Set Expectations & Overview (5 minutes) -**
Provide a brief overview of your meeting and clarify that the goal of the meeting is to take what the group has learned and apply it for long-term impact in your community and the community you served.
- Identifying Specific Areas of Participant Growth and Challenge (20 minutes) -**
Walk participants in what they learned about God and themselves during the trip. Try to lead them toward specific “next steps” of discipleship so they continue to grow in those areas.
- Discuss the Community's Needs and Future Support (15 minutes) -**
Discuss how the team can continue to support the partner community through prayer, resources, and future projects. Mention that you want to gather a subset of the group to be a part of follow-up meetings with your partners on the mission field.
- Planning for Sharing with the Church (10 minutes) -**
Prepare participants to share their stories with the wider congregation.
- Personal Reflection and Journaling Time (15 minutes) -**
Let participants have some time to reflect on the discussion and pencil in some next steps they'd like to take. While some of this will need to be done on their own time, it'll be good for them to get started.
- Wrap-Up, Closing Thoughts, and Next Steps (10 minutes) -**
Summarize the key take-aways from the meeting and the importance of taking some of the next steps you've outlined individually and corporately. Reassure participants that more structured follow-up opportunities are ahead. Clarify any dates if needed.
- Closing Prayer and Group Encouragement (5 minutes) -**
Thank everyone for coming and pray for the group as you pursue together their next steps.

As your team members share their experiences and reflect on what they learned, it'll not only continue to bond them, but get them started on their next steps.

STEP 2

Maintain Communication with Mission Partners (Ongoing)

Once you've had that first debriefing meeting shortly after the trip, it's time to implement the rest of your post-trip strategy. Start by connecting with your ministry partners regularly.

Effective communication is key to maximizing the impact of your mission trip on your partner ministry and community. By maintaining consistent contact, you show your ongoing commitment to their work. That could mean bimonthly, monthly, or quarterly video conferences. The timing will depend upon the ongoing needs of your partners. It's best to start off slow and build as more needs develop.

As mentioned in the last step, you'll need to gather a group of your mission team members who will shepherd this project. Mostly, don't fence this group. You want the people with the most interest to drive the ongoing engagement. Let people volunteer to participate. If you don't have volunteers, then you may need to ask people directly to serve.

Every church-partner relationship is a little different, but your goals will probably center on three areas: prayer, resources, and advocacy.

STEP 2

1. Establish a prayer pattern.

One of the most important ways you can support the ministry of your partners despite the distance is through prayer.

Most missions partners will have prayer lists. Make sure your team is on them. Don't just collect the requests though, encourage your team to pray both individually and corporately for the needs. Bring the requests in front of the whole church at times (not just your trip participants).

The prayer partnership doesn't need to be one way, either.

Share your high-level prayer needs with your mission partner.

2. Discuss ways your church can meet ongoing practical needs.

This can be anything from monetary needs the ministry has to volunteer support, materials, or expertise in some areas. You can't meet every need. You won't be able to meet every need you want to meet. But you can meet some. Make sure your ministry partner understands this at the outset so the expectations are healthy.

Encourage your partner to share their needs with the team during your regular meetings. Your team can then take those needs and discuss ways to meet them — whether that's through a collective response from the entire church or from individuals in the congregation. Always communicate the needs you are able to meet and those you can't. Clarity is a key to this relationship growing.

3. Look for ways to advocate for your ministry partners in your community.

Most of this work will be done outside of your regularly scheduled meetings. While you can't meet every need, you can be a connector to other Christians and other churches that can support some of your partner's needs.

You'll want to advocate internally (trying to engage more people inside of your church with the ministry) and externally (connecting your partner with other churches). Future steps will deal more with internal advocacy.

On the external side, consider hosting a luncheon (maybe with food from your ministry partner's country!) for church leaders. Start by inviting people in your denomination and other church networks. At the luncheon, share stories from your trip. Tell the other church leaders what God's doing in the community and how they can be a part of it. Encourage them to sit in on one of your partner meetings.

At some point in these partner meetings, you'll also want to discuss future trips.

An annual mission trip is a great way to continue the relationship and bring new people into the partnership. Consider not only opening up the trip to others in your church but to additional churches in your community.

STEP 3

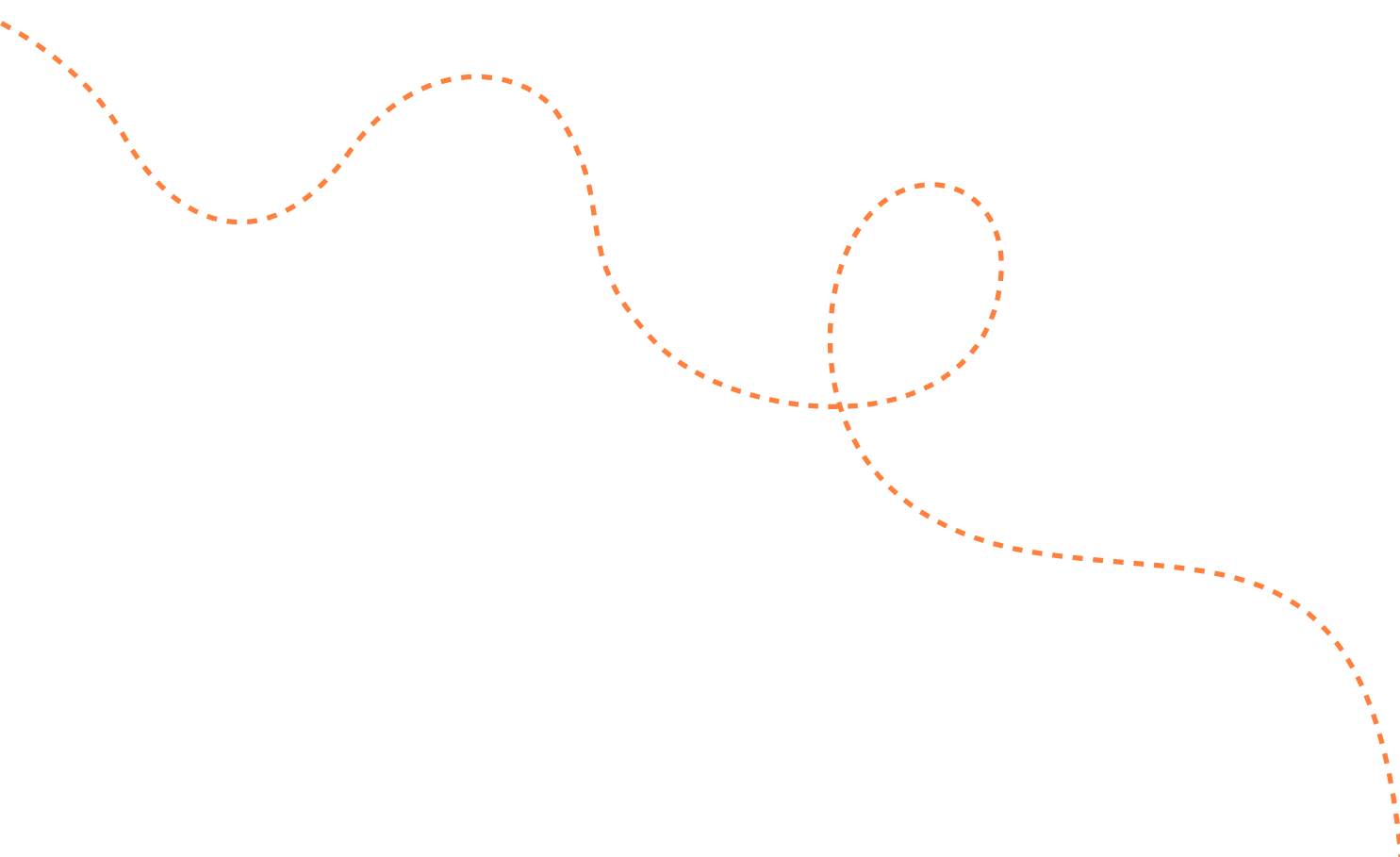
Foster Ongoing Growth in Mission Trip Participants

As mentioned earlier in the guide, your church's mission trips are about making disciples. Of course, that means making disciples on the mission field, but it also means continuing to make disciples of those who participated.

Because participating in mission trips often gets people outside of their comfort zones, it's a great opportunity to build faith and help people grow in Christlikeness. That work doesn't end when they get back home.

A monthly meeting where participants can learn to internalize what they discovered on the trip is a great start. During this monthly meeting (which you might want to host for the first six months after the trip), group members keep one another accountable for the growth that began with the trip.

Hopefully, in that first debriefing meeting, every person identified some area of their life where they grew. You want to encourage the mission trip participants to grow in that area (and others) in the following month.



STEP 3

So, how do you organize this monthly one-hour session?
It doesn't need to be complicated.

Start with a group check-in.

Welcome everyone back. Share prayer requests. Ask everyone in attendance to share one way they've seen God at work in the last month.

Break into accountability groups.

Split up into groups of 2-3 people. Have each participant share their specific growth goal (even if they have already done so in a previous meeting). Give participants this set of questions to guide their conversation together. Each person should answer each question with the group.

- **What steps did you take to grow in this area this month?**
- **What challenges did you face? How did you respond?**
- **How have you seen what you learned on the mission trip apply to daily life this month?**
- **How can the rest of us support you in this effort?**
- **What's one new action you can take this month to move toward your goal?**

(For example, if the person's goal is to pray more, make a commitment to pray for a few minutes one morning during the week.)

Once each participant has talked through the answers, encourage everyone to pray together.

Re-gather as a group and share insights and encourage one another.

Have one person from each group share some insights from the discussion, particularly focusing on what they found helpful over the past month. Or you can simply invite people to share as they felt led to do so.

Close with prayer.

Pray for the different commitments to spiritual growth that people have made.
Pray specifically for the ones of the people who shared with the larger group.
Pray that God would continue to help participants step out in faith and grow in their relationship with God.

Celebrate what God is doing in the lives of participants. Every victory – no matter how small – is worth celebrating as a group.

Consider giving each participant a journal where they can record what God is doing in their lives. This can be something that participants read parts of to both their accountability groups and the larger group.

STEP 4

Empower Participants for Local Ministry

Your local community is a mission field, just like the one your team visited. Unfortunately, many of your congregants will struggle to understand that. Your mission trip—and what you do after it—is an opportunity for them to come to terms with that truth.

Start by working with participants to describe the types of ministry they participated in during the trip in simple terms. Think of broad categories, such as evangelism, children's ministry, feeding, construction, etc. Be as specific as possible. Also, write the specific kinds of people you ministered to — young, old, language groups, etc.

Now, it's time to take those notes and find similar local ministry opportunities. To do that, encourage participants to reflect on how they saw God work through their ministry on your trip.

Pray with participants through these questions.

- **What aspect of the mission work resonated most with you?**
- **Where did you feel you were making a real difference?**

How participants answer these questions can give insights into the ministries they might feel called to support locally.

Look for local ministries that are actively involved in work that align with your mission trip participants' callings. If possible, serve as a connector between participants and those ministries.

Start small. Stress that participants don't need to make a lifelong commitment to the ministry. Urge them to try out participation through short-term participation.

One way to do this is through group projects. Group projects may not be tailored to specific callings, but they offer opportunities to serve alongside fellow mission trip members.

For example, say your mission trip was in Mexico, your team could come alongside a local Spanish-speaking church in a project of their choosing. Or, if your church worked with children on your trip, you could help out an after-school ministry near you. Then, if your participants have a good experience, you might decide to start a similar ministry at your church.

Remind your mission trip participants that serving locally can have just as much an impact on their mission trip, even if it doesn't feel as dramatic as crossing oceans to serve Jesus. Plus, as they serve nearby, they'll continue to shape a mission-minded culture in your church, potentially inspiring others to be a part of God's mission, both far away and locally.

Share the Mission Story with the Church

One of the most important ways mission trip participants can expand their impact is by helping to create a culture of missions in your church. They are a tangible reminder that God is at work throughout the world, and the rest of your church can be a part of that. Sharing their stories encourages other congregants to take part in mission opportunities both locally and internationally.

Plan a Missions Sunday

Provide a platform for your mission trip participants to tell their stories by dedicating a worship service (or potentially some other date) to share about your team's experiences. Often, Sunday nights are a good time for events like this. Promote the event well (bulletin, website, email, etc.) and make sure everyone understands the church is prioritizing attendance this Sunday.

Structure the Event for Maximum Engagement

Your goal with this event is to get more people involved in missions (through praying, giving, and going). Do your best to give your church family a glimpse of what it's like to go on a mission trip. If you pick up any local items that show the culture of the place, bring those to help people understand what the place was like. Display pictures from your trip around the room or on a screen as people are entering.

Consider inviting people to a pre-service light breakfast or snack using simple food from the area.

Once the event starts, ask mission trip participants to share their stories, focusing on moments of growth and how they saw God at work during the trip.

Include tangible next steps so everyone can understand how they can get involved.

Here are a few next-step ideas to get you started. These steps particularly focus on praying, giving, and going.

- Hand out cards with prayer requests from the field. Ask for your congregation to commit to praying for the needs of your mission partners. Make sure you include some way where they can make that commitment tangible.
- Take up an offering to meet a specific need on the mission field or related to another mission trip you have coming up.
- Invite your church family to take part in a local group project (*maybe one you developed in step four*). Describe it as an "entry step" into a future mission trip.

Conclude your time together by thanking those who attended and praying for missions opportunities in your community and around the world.

STEP 6

Evaluate and Improve Future Mission Trips

It's easy to skip an evaluation process. We all want to get on to the next project when we finish the last one. But it's important to take time to learn the lessons of past trips.

You want to maximize the effectiveness of your trip. Each trip offers valuable lessons, so take time to reflect on what worked well and what could improve. By applying these insights to future trips, you can increase your chances of making a meaningful difference over time.

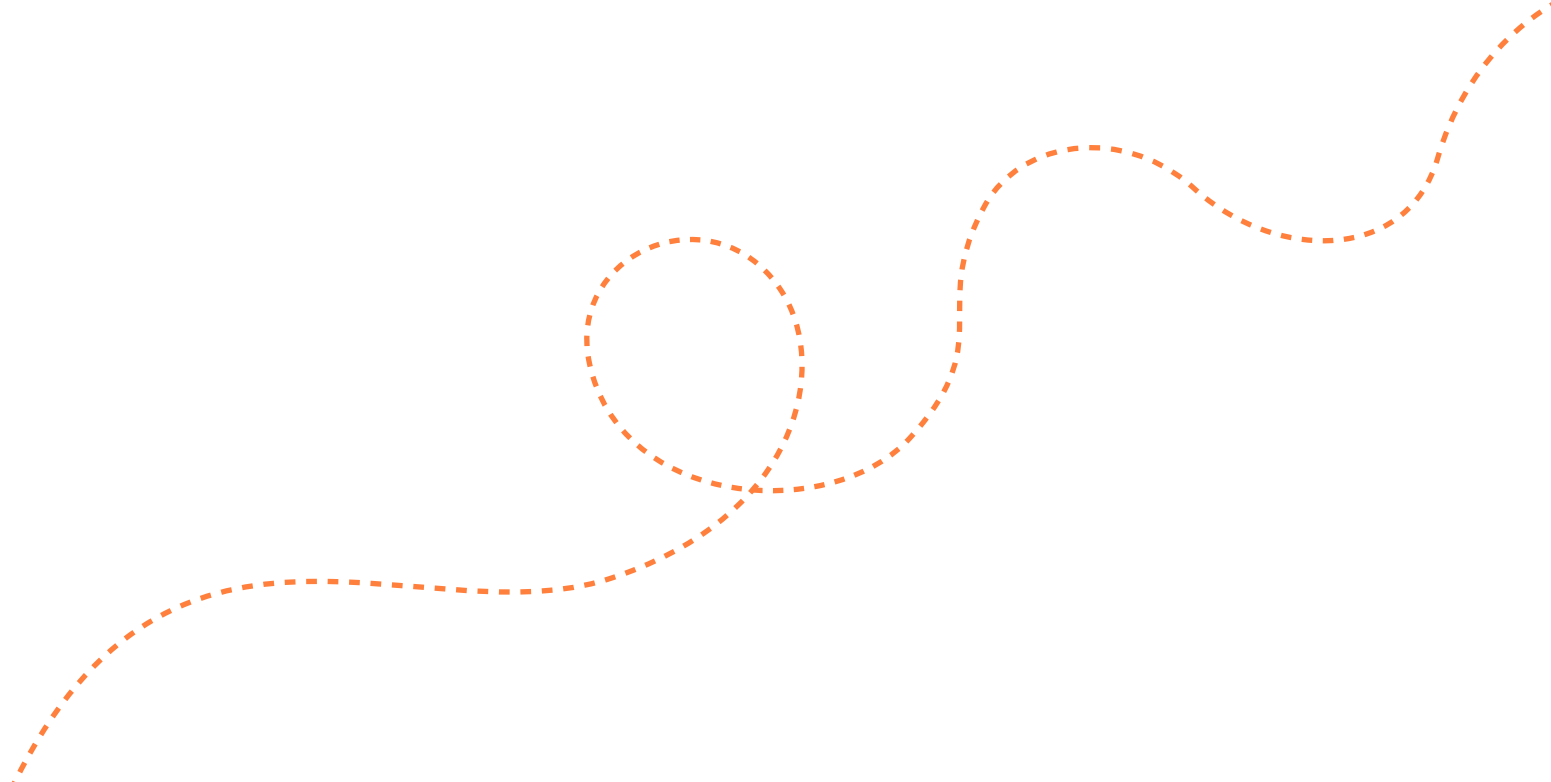
Start with a questionnaire.

You'll find some possible questions in the Appendix. Use online platforms like Google Forms, SurveyMonkey, Typeform, etc., to simplify the process for everyone involved. Make sure you include both open-ended and closed-ended questions.

You could have people fill in this questionnaire at the debriefing event, but it's usually packed. Allowing participants to do this at their own convenience gives them an opportunity to give more focused thought to it.

Keep good notes at the debriefing meeting.

In a sense, your debriefing can act as a "focus group," helping you and other trip organizers see the strengths and weaknesses of the trip. In the section on step one, this guide mentions having someone else take notes during the debrief, particularly related to next steps your church needs to make. A second note taker to keep track of learnings about what worked and what didn't is helpful as well.



STEP 6

That note-taker should look out for the following.

- **Strengths and weaknesses of the trip:**
Note what went well and what didn't.
- **Where participants felt unprepared:**
You'll want to find out where your training came up short.
- **Suggestions for future trips:**
Often, these suggestions will be plentiful. Right after the trip is a great time to note these.
- **Stressors before, during, and after the trip:**
You're looking for challenges related to the trip that people faced. This will allow you to either avoid them in the future or at least warn future participants they're coming.

Get input from your partners.

It's important to understand if your team was helpful or a hindrance on the field. The challenge is that getting honest feedback can be difficult.

If you are the team leader, schedule a debrief with the church's main contact with the partnering ministry. Ask questions like:

- **How would you describe your experience working with our group?**
- **What did your team find particularly helpful, and what did you find challenging about our team?**
- **How well did our team support your ministry's goals?**
- **What can we do differently to better prepare our team for trips like this?**
- **Is there anything you feel uncomfortable sharing but you think we should know?**

It's not enough to gather input from your team and your partners.

You need to act upon it. As you prepare for future trips, make sure you look back at learnings from these previous trips to make sure you're improving the experience for everyone involved.

Turn the Mission Trip into a Missional Lifestyle

The ultimate goal of your post-trip discipleship is to help participants live out a missional lifestyle. You want participants to recognize everyday opportunities to share the love of God in word and deed.

Part of that will happen in organized activities they take part in through your church and in other ministries in your community. But at most, people will spend a few hours a week in organized ministry efforts. For the vast majority of their time, they'll be in their workplaces, their homes, and their communities. A lifetime of impact begins when all of us realize that every place we go is a mission field – from the grocery store to the office to our kids' schools.

Here are a few ideas to help mission trip participants take this important step.



Encourage participants to develop daily missional practices.

Begin each day with a prayer, asking God to reveal someone they can help—whether through evangelism or a simple act of care. Challenge them to set a daily goal to take one missional action and provide gentle reminders in group check-ins.



Incorporate missional living prompts in your monthly meetings.

In step three, the guide recommended a monthly meeting to help foster spiritual growth. Include questions about daily missional activities at that time.



Celebrate stories about everyday missions.

We become what we celebrate. When you hear stories about team members (or others in your church) who have seen exciting results of everyday ministry opportunities, share those stories with the team.



Train in evangelism.

You might have done this before the trip, depending on the trip. If not, make sure everyone is comfortable sharing their faith.



Commission participants for everyday mission opportunities.

This is about mindset. You might have commissioned your team before the trip. Commissioning them when they return helps them to see their everyday life as an ongoing missions experience.

Of all the post-trip work you do, helping people live on mission daily will probably lead to the most impact.



Your Mission Trip is Just the Beginning!

You put a lot of work in on your mission trip. It's tempting to think that those few days represent the culmination of your work.

You're just getting started, though. The steps in this guide will help you multiply your impact far beyond just a single week a year.

Imagine a church where every member lives on a mission, where people have the same passion to share the love of Jesus with their neighbor as they did on the trip. That's within your reach.

Now, it's time for the real work. While the steps in this guide are simple, they aren't easy.

But the result—a team living on mission wherever they are—is well worth it.