



## UPSTREAM



# EVALUATING PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS SENDING CHURCH ELEMENT #6

Partnerships with missions organizations and field partners are a key part of the execution of a church's missions vision and strategy. Missions organizations and field partners provide the framework for Sent-Ones to be sent well and to be guided on-the-field to accomplish the missions God has entrusted to them and to your church.

These partnerships, at their best, serve the Sending Church and the Sent-One with services that go beyond the purview of a sending church. For example missions organizations provide backend services like donation processing, payroll, tax & legal services, etc. On-field leaders provide leadership, cultural understanding, and day-to-day supervision that is difficult for a church thousands of miles away to provide. When these partnerships line up with the needs of the Sending Church and the Sent-One it really accelerates ministry. When these partnerships are not at their best it can create sideways energy, lack of clarity, and even mission drift for the Sent-One. The process of evaluating sending partners is vital for the process of Sending.

Let's start with why evaluating sending organizations is important. Sending organizations are not meant to replace the church, but to complement the church. All too often, however, sending organizations have taken on too much of the role of the sending church. Going beyond providing help with backend services to taking on all the assessment, all the care, and all the supervision. To the point where the church is barely involved, if not shut out of the process. This is understandable from an organizational standpoint, because most churches aren't trying to be a sending church. However, your church is! Therefore, this process of evaluating partner organizations is critical for making sure that your church has the ability to speak into areas that you should for the health of your Sent-One and for your involvement as a church.

Beyond evaluating Sending Organizations, even more vital is evaluating Team Leaders that will supervise your people overseas. The goal of an on-field Team Leader is to provide vision and daily oversight of the Sent-One from your church that you need to delegate due to your church's distance both geographically and in cultural understanding of the location. The choosing of an on-field team leader is a make or break choice for your Sent-One. Most reasons for coming back from the field have to do with issues with

the team, not the difficulty of living overseas. Evaluating the Team Leader's character, disposition, vision, successes/failures, theological bents, practical leadership skills, care strategies, etc. will impact your Sent-One more than anything else.

Overseas partnerships are also important for involving the entirety of the church in a mission that is engaging. Who hosts their short-term team and the motivation by which they host them is vital for Goers returning with excitement, with stories to tell the church, and with the consideration of going back long-term. People are drawn to want to be a part of something that's exciting and something that is winning! Uninteresting and ineffective missionaries and missions fields are not compelling to our people, but unfortunately, for many missions leaders, these are all they have before them.

Feel the weight of that?!?!?! You should! But cheer up. There are lots of great Team Leaders overseas. So let's turn our attention to how you can develop these partnerships. Let's start with where to find these partnerships. There's a few avenues that tend to work the best:

1. Beginning a partnership with a trusted missions agency and having them direct you towards great partners. This could be a denominational missions agency, or a missions agency that you have previously built relationship with. We'll take a look at questions in the next section for evaluating missions agencies.
2. Look next to your existing overseas partnerships. Think through who you may want to invest in more heavily and partner with more deeply. In this article, there are questions for new and existing partnerships to evaluate their fit with you as a Sending Church.
3. Go back to your vision and strategy documents that you've created. Re-evaluate those and make sure that you feel great about where you're headed as a Sending Church.

Likely you will be looking for new partnerships as well throughout this process. I've found four things needed for finding new partnerships: Time, networking, trips, and prayer.

**Time** - Partnerships unfortunately do not grow on trees. It takes the sovereignty of God to bring across your path the right opportunities for long-term partnerships. If you're looking for a quick fix, there's lots of great short-term opportunities around. If you're looking to make long-term impact, you will need to be patient for God's timing.

**Networking** - The best place to start is to ask around to your friends and co-laborers about who they are finding success partnering with. Oftentimes, if you like and trust the person you're asking, you'll like the person they are partnered with on the field. Beyond this, missions conferences can be a good place to connect with missions organizations.

**Trips** - Once you've begun to get to know some partnerships and are narrowing down to the ones you want to partner with, there's really nothing better for deciding on a partnership than getting into the country and the city where that partner lives and where you want to send team members. These trips tend to give clarity to questions that can't be simply asked over Zoom. They need to often be experi-

enced over dinner, while sharing the Gospel with nationals, while spending late nights with Team Leaders and Team Members. Check out some great questions for [Vision Trips](#).

Pray - Last, but obviously not least is prayer. Acts 13:1-3 gives us the model of the church of Antioch and prayer. Do not rush partnerships. Ask the Lord to help guide you in his providence. Candidly, this article isn't a formula. It is my best attempt to help you put up your sails and so that when the Spirit of God moves, you catch the wind He's blowing. All great partnerships have been a combination of taking steps towards God's leading and divine interactions. Sometimes, I've even accidentally found great partners on the field through missed or changed flights. Do the work, but trust in the timing of the Lord. Don't accelerate his timeline, but intentionally wait.

Let's get into the questions to guide you in finding partnerships.

## Questions to Ask Missions Agencies

It's likely that one of your first stops on the road to finding new partnerships are missions agencies. Check out List of Missions Organizations for some great contacts at some strong missions organizations. There are many great agencies out there. Let's start with some questions for missions agencies.

\*Note that the questions alongside the title are questions for you to consider. The questions in the bullet points are what you would ask the agency.

Vision - Does the vision and mission of this organization align with our theological and philosophical beliefs about global missions?

- What are your theological beliefs?
- What is the overall vision and mission of your organization?
- With hundreds of mission organizations around, why do you exist? - What you are looking for here is to see, first of all how clear it is because that will tell you how well the organization is run, and second of all, you're looking to see ways their vision overlaps with your Theology, Vision, and Strategy.

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Values - Do they value what we value as a church in global missions?

- What are some values that define your organization?
- Do you work to empower nationals?
- Do your people work in teams? Are those teams from just your organization or multiple organizations?
- What are the rhythms of most teams?
- How do you encourage sanctification amongst your missionaries? (You're looking here for if their spirit of sanctification is more Gospel-centric or behavior modification).

Strategy - Are they attempting to accomplish the strategy in ways that align with how we want to go about our missions strategy?

- In what ways are you trying to accomplish this vision?
- Are you focused on unengaged, unreached, or reached people groups?
- How is church planting talked about in your organization? Is it a high priority? How strict are the church planting models?

Team Structure - Do they value team in life and in ministry?

- What is the structure & value of team within your organization?
- What is the composition of most teams? Are they a part of multiple organizations or just your organization?
- What is the member care structure? How many member-care people per missionary?

Administrative & Supervisory Support - Does the organization adhere to the “Goldilocks” principle? Do they provide enough support, too much support, or the just right amount of support?

- What is the authority structure for people sent by your organization?
- How is the church involved in caring for and being involved in the strategy of their Sent-Ones?
- Donor processing, payroll, insurance, etc?
- What percentage of admin fee do you take?
- What does insurance look like? Is there a time limit on how long they can receive health care in the US?

Locations - Do they have the locations you desire to be in? Oftentimes there are great organizations who are not all encompassing in their work.

- What locations are you in around the world?
- Why are you there? (You can glean a lot of their missions’ vision if you ask this question).
- How do you decide to start a new work in a new location around the world? What needs to be in place to start that work?

Assessment Process - Does their assessment process complement your assessment process? Think Goldilocks principle here again.

- What qualities and requirements are you looking for on those who should go overseas? - They should be able to produce something simple for you to see.
- Where do you see people get hung up in the assessment process with your organization? - This will display some of their rules and values to you.

Training & Development - Is their pre-field and on-field training sufficient for Sent-Ones? Does it complement what your church is doing? Think Goldilocks principle again.

- What training is provided and required prior to going overseas? - You will want to consider the timing, frequency, and length of training.
- What training is provided on the field? - Missions Agencies that have regular on-field training, as opposed to only pre-field training, are going to be more successful.

Successes and Failures - Are they transparent about their successes and failures as a missions organization?

- What are some successful mission endeavors that your agency is a part of? (These should be on the tip of their tongue).
- What are some failures you've seen and what have you taken away from those failures? (You're looking for some vulnerability in them, not defensiveness, or explaining away).

Once you begin the partnership with a missions organization, you will want to ask for more specific partnerships with field leaders from that organization. This is something you can ask missions organizations to provide for you. In years past, this was difficult to obtain, but any missions organization you would want to partner with can and should make their options available to you. Share with them your vision and strategy and let them help you find great team leaders and field partners to connect with.

## Narrowing Down Field Partners

The following are some groupings of questions that can help you evaluate partnership with various Team Leaders. There can be a temptation to go for the first Leader that seems to fit your criteria. Be careful of rushing to partnership. If you've ever bought a home, you know, you don't buy the first house you visit. You have to check out a few to make the right decision.

Take your time, ask a few Team Leaders these questions. Note that the following questions could bring about a wide variety of answers. They are worded specifically to do so to meet the needs of a wide variety of churches and what they desire to learn from asking these questions. We will give some categories of global missions to help provide context and spectrums for the questions, but does not mean that the examples are what we prescribe. You need to look at your vision and strategy before you develop your questions. As well, you may find some questions in here that you need to reverse engineer into your vision because they are not included currently.

Vision and Strategy - Does the vision of the team fit into our categories of missions from our vision and strategy?

- What is your vision? How is that vision being accomplished? (Asking them to articulate their vision will go a long way. If they don't have a clearly articulated vision, that should be a yellow

or red light about partnership)

- Are you focused on church planting or do you connect new believers with existing churches? (i.e. Are they into CPM and to what degree? Are they parachurch?)
- What's your disciple-making vision? Are you fast, slow? What material or ideals do you focus on in discipleship? (i.e. Do they focus on DMM? T4T?)
- Would you consider the people you are reaching "reached" or "unreached?"
- How well are Americans received in your location?

Theological Leanings - What are some distinctives theologically or philosophically that guide them? They may be evangelical, but are there any wacky beliefs?

- What are you reading as a team or as individuals? (Are there any trends of unhealthy theology they are leaning towards like: Bethel; Prosperity Gospel; Legalism; License)
- Are there any theological categories that define your team? (Charismatic; Reformed; Conservative, Moderate, or Liberal Theologically; etc.)

Church Partnership - Is the vision of the team on the ground one that will pull the church into a relationship with that team and our people that we send there?

- What ways can we be involved as a church in Sent-One Care, evaluating strategy, and sending short-term to your location?

Teaming - Is it a healthy team?

- What is the purpose of the team to you all and what are the rhythms of that team? (You want to look for a team that has rhythms that line up with the healthy version of your church)
- What is your daily and weekly work schedule? What are your rhythms of rest, vacation, Sabbath, and Stateside? (It's important that they are conducting healthy rhythms. The missions field is an easy place to get burnt out).
- Do they have a Gospel-centered approach to work and life? Is there authenticity? Are they emotionally healthy? (You could probably find this out by the books they are reading. If Jerry Bridges or Peter Scazzaro are on their list, it's probably good).
- What's the health of your families and relationships?
- What are some of the struggles people on the team are facing?
- How do people on the team make time for learning, making mistakes, and trying new things?
- What space is made for discipleship & Mentoring of the Sent-One on the team?
- How important is language and culture learning to your team?

Effectiveness - What is the state of the work and is it effective or all talk?

- What stage are you in in your missions work? Evangelism, Discipleship, Church Planting, or Church Multiplying?

- Do you have a vision to send out nationals to the more unreached of the world?
- What's your 2-3 biggest pain points at this time?
- What are some stories that we can rejoice in?

Short-term Trips - Will they be a good partner for involving your members on short-term trips?

- Have you received short-term trips before? What went well, what didn't go well?
- What part do short-term trips play into your overall vision?
- Are short-term trips a blessing or a curse for you on the field? Why?

Questions for For Potential Sent-Ones to Consider in Deciding on a Field location:

- Do I want to do life with these people? Would I want to do game night with these people?
- Is there a role for me on the team that uses my giftings and passions? Will I have a good role in discipleship and church planting that fits my giftings within the team?
- What am I not going to enjoy doing as a part of this team?
- Do the team rhythms make sense with what I sense God has called me and my church to do cross-culturally?

As you've asked some of these questions Stateside, there's no substitute for getting on a plane, seeing the city, the work, and the leaders and seeing the answers given in real life. Evaluate the location based on how well it fits in with your overall theology, vision and strategy. If answers to these questions are positive, then look at doing a vision trip or a short-term trip to this location. Some resources that can help you in this include:

- Partnership Grid
- Vision Trips