

Missions Strategy
Working paper
Global Strategy Roundtable
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Executive Summary

Developing a missions strategy is an important step in helping your church make a deep and lasting impact globally. A strategy will involve saying “no” to lots of good opportunities, but will help you to say “yes” to even bigger and better opportunities. As Stephen Covey has said, “the enemy of the “best” is often the “good.” Our job to advance the Kingdom of heaven is too important to settle for good. This paper will cover why you need to create a strategy, how to create a strategy, and things to consider while creating a strategy.

Why create a strategy

The church is called to be a good steward of the resources entrusted to it. Much like the parable of the talents, the church, it's leaders, and congregants will be held responsible for how they used their time and resources. As Rick Warren says, “It's not enough to be faithful, a church must be effective.” The work of advancing the Kingdom is too important to do haphazardly. We must have a plan. Just as individual Christians are called to specific types of ministry, each individual church is uniquely tasked with a certain calling. “When missions becomes too broad, it is difficult to make a solid impact in the most critical, or strategic arenas, toward the big purpose or goal.¹” The purpose of having a strategy is to ensure that your church is making a difference where it has been specifically called.

A strategy will

- create a deep and lasting impact in the areas you choose to focus
- Provide scope and filters that help you know what opportunities and partnerships to say “yes” to
- help excite and focus your congregation
- help you communicate your global involvement with your congregation
- increase giving towards missions

How to create a strategy

Getting Started

1. Pray

This isn't really a step and should be applied through the entire process. Ask God to guide you and your team through this process. Pray for discernment and wisdom.

2. Gather the appropriate people

Determine who your key stakeholders are. It could be your pastor, your missions board, or other leaders. You may also want to consider asking someone who is not directly involved in

¹ David Mays, “Developing a Missions Strategy That Fits Your Church”,
<http://www.davidmays.org/Strategy/Contents.html>

missions, but has experience in developing and implementing strategy. Consider asking someone who is currently uninvolved with missions at your church. This individual will bring fresh perspective to your conversation. Be sure to get someone who is aware of your church's historical involvement with missions. You'll want to make sure that whoever you invite can be as impartial as possible. Everyone needs to understand and be on board with the big picture of what you are trying to accomplish. It would be wise not to include the uncle of one of your existing partners.

It is important that everyone involved keeps this process confidential. You wouldn't want word to get out prematurely that your strategy is going to exclude an existing partner. Developing strategy is an iterative process. It would be a shame to get a partner all worked up over nothing. If the time does come to cut ties, you want to be sure that the conversation is done in an honoring way, not through the rumor mill.

3. Set the tone

In missions there are many sacred cows. It is important that you create a safe place for tough questions to be asked and assumptions to be challenged. Nothing should be off limits, and everything should be reconsidered. Again, this reiterates the importance about having the right people around the table.

Discovering your missions scope and filters

4. Review your history in regards to missions

Even though you didn't previously have a strategy you should not assume that God wasn't leading your church. Look for common themes in the types of missions work your church has been involved with in the past. Perhaps you are a sending church, a church that has a heart for Asia, or a church that works in the humanitarian sector, etc.

5. Review your current partnerships and involvement

Write emails, set up Skype meetings, ask for annual reports, in order to get a clear understanding of what each of your currently supported missionaries or organizations are trying to accomplish. Look for themes in all the current work you are involved in.

Implementation

6. Prepare to write your strategy

Consider what you want to be part of your strategy. Are there certain places in the world that your church feels called to? Are there certain topics or issues (leadership development, human trafficking, evangelising to Muslims, etc.) that your congregation is passionate about? Are there certain criteria for how you want your partners to operate? The challenge will be to find the sweet spot between having a strategy that is too broad or too restrictive. Ideally you will end up with several different filters (eg, location, areas of focus, implementation, church affiliation etc.) as this will help keep you from being too broad.

One criteria that every church should have is that all missions partners are Christ centered. Having Christian leadership is not enough. An organization may offer humanitarian aid, which is

a great thing, but they need to offer the aid while also sharing the gospel that is appropriate for their context.

7. Write your strategy

Remembering that you are only one church, and that you do have limited resources, prayerfully consider where God is calling your church to make an impact. Your strategy should act as a filter, it should rule out opportunities as well as make clear the opportunities that you should commit to. Write down your strategy, and document your thought process as to why you chose what you did. Having the strategy and thought process documented will be helpful in the future as you may or may not reconsider or challenge what you have come up with.

8. Get buy-in from key leadership

It is crucially important that before you implement your strategy that your key leadership is on board. Key leadership includes your senior pastor, and your missions board (if you have one). It is inevitable that your strategy will cause you to end some financial partnerships, and by getting your key leadership on board it will provide a catalyst to have those tough conversations.

9. Implement your strategy

Once you have a strategy in place, it's very likely that you will have to end some financial partnerships. The first step is to inform your leadership and make sure that you are all on the same page. In some cases this will be informing your senior pastor, and/or your missions board. If your leadership has been your strategy implementation, it will make this process go much smoother.

When telling a missionary or organization that you will be ending support, do so with grace. Be sure to celebrate the partnership that you have had and clearly explain why you are ending your support (change of strategy). If possible give the missionary or organization as much notice as possible so that they have time to replace the lost funding. In some cases you may choose not just cut off an organization right away, but rather steadily decrease their support over a couple of years.

Cutting support can be very difficult, but don't let that deter you from moving your missions partnerships from good to great.

Communication

10. Communicate and share your strategy

When you are ready and feel comfortable with your strategy begin to share it with your congregation. Be sure to cast the vision as to why having a strategy is important and will help your church advance the Kingdom of Heaven. Remember to keep your strategy in front of your congregation, and share updates on how your strategy is helping make a difference. As you communicate about your strategy be sure to leverage the opportunity to educate your congregation on why missions matter, raise awareness about your partnerships, and promotion of upcoming opportunities for your congregation to get involved.

Other considerations for your strategy

Your strategy is not just limited to defining with whom or where you will partner, it can also define how you partner. Some questions for you to consider are:

- Is there opportunity for relationship between the congregation and the missionary/organization?
- Will there be opportunities for the congregation to interact with the organization?
- How will the missionary/organization be accountable for their work and use of support?
- How will the missionary/organization carry out their mission?
- What is the capacity of the ministry partnership or person?
- How is the ministry governed? If the key leader gets hit by a Mack truck tomorrow, will the ministry continue?
- What is their record of performance, how have they used the things they've been trusted with in the past?

Helpful Resources

- <http://www.davidmays.org> - A website with useful information about creating strategy around missions
- ACMC Missions Profile - Helps church leaders assess their progress in mobilizing their church for missions involvement
 - <http://www.gadoodles.com/GBC/docs/MissionsAssessmentProfile.pdf>
- First Church's Missions Strategy - A scorecard created to help First Church narrow it's focus