



## How to Host a Volunteer Builders Group

*Adapted from the Volunteer Mobilization Project Logistics manual,  
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**Who Can Invite Volunteers?**

No matter what the task, there is power in numbers. If you want to get something done, invite people to join you. That is the essence of the front end of volunteer mobilization. God is at work throughout Texas, and He has placed people in important locations to be stewards of ministry. Often, they need assistance that can come from short-term volunteer mission teams and individuals.

In Southern Baptist life, the call for volunteers typically comes from **missionaries**. Often, they are associational **directors of missions, ministry center directors, resort area missionaries**, and so forth. However, the ability to invite volunteers is not limited to those who have a missionary designation. Others might also issue the invitation. **Church planters** frequently invite volunteers to assist them. At first, it may be to help with community survey work. Later, the church planter may issue an invitation for construction workers to come help build the physical structure that the church needs to minister in its community.

While **new churches** often are recipients of volunteers, **established churches** also issue invitations for volunteers to assist in church growth initiatives. The **Southern Baptists of Texas Convention** often has major initiatives represented by partnerships. To meet the partnership needs, the convention actively recruits volunteers. State partnerships provide some of the most fulfilling pathways for volunteers. Prayer and a clear understanding of God's will must precede an invitation. Likewise, each step of the mobilization process should be saturated with prayer.

**Have You Cast the Vision?**

The purpose of volunteer mobilization is not to mobilize for the sake of the volunteer. The purpose is to meet local objectives. For the person who invites volunteers to a locale, leadership begins with a vision for what God wants to accomplish. Mobilizing volunteers without a clear purpose and objective

is a blind endeavor. When people are giving up vacation and family time to assist you, they need to see the big picture. Before you consider inviting volunteers to assist you, it is imperative that you have a clear vision of what God has called you to accomplish in your place of ministry. It is unlikely that any single mission team of volunteers will complete the vision. They will work on “a piece of the pie.” You may invite a construction team to come help paint concrete block walls. There are many mission teams willing to do that. However, it would be a shame if that volunteer team leaves and never understands that the walls they are painting will some day house a Crisis Pregnancy Center, a church, or a ministry center.

As you begin talking to potential volunteers, be ready to answer the following questions:

- What has God called you to accomplish in your locale?
- What evidence do you see of God at work?
- What difference will the volunteers make?
- What do you believe the ministry will look like in five to ten years?

### **Have You Defined the Task?**

Parallel to casting the vision is defining the task. What do you want the volunteers to do? In volunteerism, we often warn volunteers that they must be flexible. While that is true, volunteers are most often “flexed” due to poor planning. Poor planning can be avoided.

To help you define the task, be prepared to answer the following questions:

- What help is needed in this venue?
- What can volunteers do to help?
- What is the time frame for accomplishing this objective?
- What materials will the volunteers need?
- Can an individual accomplish it, or does it call for group participation?

If you are in the midst of a church-building project, no single short-term mission team will erect the building for you. Teams will complete phases of the project. Through good planning, you can schedule the framing, roofing, electrical, plumbing, and finishing crews. Flexibility for volunteers is necessary in construction as projected work might not be accomplished in the desired time frame. That flexibility can be understood. However, volunteers have a hard time being flexible when permits have not been pulled and materials have not been secured before the volunteers arrive.

A clearly defined task increases efficiency, reduces anxiety for the volunteer, and contributes to repeat volunteers. Taking the time to define the task for each volunteer and volunteer mission team may be the most important step in your planning process. Cutting corners at this stage will prove to be more harmful than beneficial, so take the time to define the task.

### **Lodging Arrangements**

This is one of the first questions a host will be asked. Be ready with an answer. Lodging can be one of the greatest expenses for volunteers. If they do not receive assistance with lodging, it may prohibit participation. These questions will help you plan for lodging:

- How many people will come with the volunteer?
- What is the gender ratio of the volunteer mission?
- If a student mission team is responding, what is the student-to-adult ratio?
- Can the mission team afford to stay in a hotel or motel?
- Will volunteers need to bring sleeping bags, pillows, or other items?
- Is there a church in your community that will do home stays?
- Is there a church in your community that can house volunteers in their building?

- Is there a church camp in the area that might be available for lodging, showers, and meals?
- Can you rent space in a local school (during the summer) or community center to house volunteers?
- Will the volunteers have to pay for housing?
- Are shower facilities available, or will you need shower trailers?

Lodging is one of the most sensitive issues for volunteers. You do not have to make “luxury arrangements,” but volunteers do need a clear understanding before they arrive of where they will stay. Many volunteer mission teams are willing to pay for hotels or other lodging arrangements. The financial arrangements for housing need to be clear up front.

### **Will Meals be Provided?**

Volunteers work hard during their time on a project, and they can get very hungry. Breakfast is particularly important as volunteers will burn many calories during the day. Like every aspect of volunteer mobilization logistics, the food arrangements need to be clear up front. These questions will help your planning for meals:

- Will the volunteer team need to bring his/her own cooks? If so, where will they cook?
- Will the volunteer team need to bring portable cooking appliances?
- Can the host provide meals? How many each day?
- If volunteers do home stays, can their hosts provide one or more meals each day?
- What are the catering options?
- If volunteers are housed in rented school or community center space, can kitchens there be used for meal preparation? Can the kitchen staff be hired to prepare the meals?
- What is the estimated cost of meals for each volunteer?
- What menus would be appropriate for the volunteers?
- Will any volunteer require special dietary considerations?
- Can the local association (or churches in the association) provide meals?

Everyone likes home cooking. While you may not be able to provide that, any assistance you offer to ensure quality food service will be greatly appreciated by the volunteers.

### **Transportation Arrangements**

Transportation should be one of the simplest arrangements made for volunteers. Typically, when mission teams come to help you, they travel in vans or buses. These vehicles become their “ride” to and from the work site each day. It would be best to have an understanding up front with volunteer mission teams that they must provide transportation during the week for each participant they bring to the project. That may sound simple enough, but transportation can become complicated if you have multiple work sites. Here are some preliminary questions you may want to ask:

- What will the daily transportation needs be for this project?
- Will you provide maps with directions to the work sites?
- Does the responding church have sufficient vans, buses, and automobiles to transport volunteers safely during the week?
- Will those vehicles be properly serviced before the project?
- Is the insurance current on those vehicles? Will the insurance papers be with the vehicles? Are there insurance restrictions on the use of the church’s vehicles?
- Do you have a backup plan to use local vehicles in case of breakdowns or multiple work sites stretching the resources of the responding church?
- If volunteers are flying, what arrangements will they need for ground transportation? Is it understood, who covers the cost of rented vehicles?

- Have you provided an area map to the mission team leaders with markings to direct them to their lodging and projects?

When volunteer mission teams fly to the project, they typically are still responsible for local transportation, which means the responding church (volunteers) rents vehicles during the project. Many host churches have vans or buses that can be used to facilitate local transportation. The more you are able to do as a host to help volunteers the better. Plus, it may increase the number of volunteers willing to assist you. But the key, as in all phases of project logistics, is to have a clear understanding up front with the responding volunteer mission team.

### **How Large a Builder Team Can You Host?**

No matter how great the task might be in your area of ministry, the number of volunteers you can invite will be determined as much by logistics as by the task itself. Hosting 100 volunteers when you only have room and meaningful work for 50 may create frustration for the volunteers and you. Before issuing an invitation to volunteers, consider these questions:

- How many volunteers does the defined task require?
- Can each volunteer stay engaged in meaningful ministry during each day of the project?
- What sleeping arrangements will the responding mission team require?
- If volunteers in your church or community will be providing some or all of the meals, how many meals can the local volunteers prepare?

### **Do You Need a Covenant?**

A covenant is an agreement between two parties that defines expectations and desired results. (The covenant agreement might also be called a letter of understanding.) While it is not a legal document like a contract, it does help facilitate communication between two parties. The sample covenant in **Attachment-A** can be used as a template. It can be customized to meet your needs. To help customize the covenant, answer the following questions:

- Does the letter of understanding clearly state the objective (i.e., define the task) you are asking the volunteers to accomplish?
- Are dates of implementation included in the letter of understanding agreement?
- Does the letter of understanding clearly state agreements concerning meals, lodging, and transportation?
- Does the letter of understanding include a prayer commitment?
- Are all costs to be born by volunteers made clear in the letter of understanding?

The signing of the covenant agreement by the responding church can be done in a church service. Such a ceremony can help the responding church promote the project and serve as a call to prayer.

### **Spiritual Needs of the Volunteers**

A volunteer project can be a very special time in the life of a volunteer. Often, a volunteer project represents a period of time—usually one week—when a Christian is as focused on his/her understanding of God's will for his/her life as at any other time. While they are learning about missions experientially, the volunteer's growth may not be as complete if they do not have cognitive and spiritual learning as well. Likewise, when a church issues an invitation to volunteers, the spiritual growth of the host church's members also must be a priority. Worship and mission education need to be a part of each volunteer initiative. A volunteer may learn how to put shingles on a roof, but they also need to understand the biblical basis for missions.

Much of the responsibility for ministry to the volunteers will fall on the leadership of the responding church. However, a host can facilitate the objective of equipping the volunteer for spiritual growth:

- Have you prepared a weekly schedule that includes time for worship, Bible study, and personal devotions (quiet times)?
- Will the volunteers have adequate facilities for worship and Bible study?
- Will Bible study and worship include members of the host church?
- Have you discussed plans with the mission team leaders for worship and Bible study? Is it clear whose responsibility this will be during the week?

Volunteer projects are often physically exhausting. The experience does not have to include long services or teaching times. Spiritual emphasis can come through work site devotions, evening debriefs and testimonies, maintaining daily journals, and small group sharing.

### **Follow-up Plans.**

As a host to volunteers, you have asked them to join you in accomplishing the vision God has given you. As stated earlier, it is unlikely that any single mission team will be able to accomplish everything that your ministry needs. Each mission team or individual will work on a part of the whole. Short-term volunteer initiatives may be short-term in presence, but the relationship does not have to be short-term. Relationships are important to volunteers. They want to know you, their host. They want to understand the ministry and to feel a part of what God is doing there. Also, they want to know that their labor will continue to build the kingdom of God:

- Do you have a newsletter? If so, consider offering to put each volunteer on your mailing list.
- Have you prepared a thank-you note to the volunteers? This does not have to be a personal note to each one, but it would be appropriate to send a note of appreciation to each one.
- Would it be possible to give a gift to each volunteer, particularly to the pastor and/or mission team leader? It does not need to be expensive. A simple gift that represents the community or region would be fine.
- Could you prepare certificates of appreciation for volunteers? Certificates can be designed on a computer.
- How will you follow up on the work performed by the volunteers, and how will the report of your follow up be reported to the volunteers?

An active follow-up plan helps affirm volunteers, show appreciation, and increase the possibility that the volunteers will want to return to help.

### **Medical Response Plan.**

Accidents can happen. Accidents can even happen to good people while doing good things. Suffering an injury or illness while away from home creates anxiety for volunteers. Most often, the incidences you face will include cuts, sprains, nausea, and cramps. These are relatively simple conditions to treat and will not require emergency medical response.

If you are inviting volunteers to your community—particularly if you have several mission teams coming over the summer—it would be good to establish a relationship with a general practitioner—preferably a Christian—who will agree to see volunteers who need medical attention. While the volunteer is responsible for all of their medical expenses, the arrangements you make may include a reduced examination fee. The physician will be a stranger to the volunteer, but the fact that you have a relationship with the doctor will be reassuring to the volunteer.

- Have you made prior arrangements with a local general practitioner to see volunteers who need non-emergency medical assistance?
- Will there be registered nurses or physicians traveling with the volunteers?

- Have you clearly communicated to the responding volunteers that they must provide proof of medical insurance, and that the volunteers are responsible for their medical expenses?
- Have volunteers provided their mission team leaders with medical release forms?
- Do the volunteer mission team leaders have a plan for dispensing medicines during the project?
- Do the volunteers have a first aid kit?
- Have you provided volunteer leaders with a list of local emergency phone numbers?

Good preparation can keep an incident from becoming an emergency. The plans you make in advance will be greatly appreciated by the volunteers.

### **What Can the Volunteers Wear?**

Dress codes can be a sensitive subject. Nevertheless, improper dress can inhibit Christian witness and, in some cases, contribute to injuries. On construction projects, volunteers will typically need to wear long pants, usually jeans or work pants.

Depending on the phase of construction, the volunteers also might need to wear work boots instead of tennis shoes. For some phases, volunteers might be encouraged to wear steel-toed shoes. As a host, the volunteer mission team will look to you for direction concerning dress, particularly casual dress.

- What type of clothing will present the best Christian witness in your community?
- Will jeans or shorts be appropriate?
- Will volunteers need “dress clothes” for any worship services they might attend? Or, will they be attending worship services where casual dress is acceptable?
- Will the volunteers be able to do laundry during the week?

Do not hesitate to communicate to volunteer mission teams that short-shorts, shirts with thin shoulder straps, miniskirts, and tank tops are inappropriate. You might also caution against T-shirts that have inappropriate messages.

### **What is the Schedule?**

A daily schedule is one of the most important logistical issues in volunteer planning. Volunteers who are coming at their expense and during their vacation to volunteer want to know what they will be doing. By working with mission team leaders to produce a daily schedule before the project begins, you are communicating to the volunteers that much thought and planning have gone into this project. You also will be encouraging the volunteers by telling them that their time will be well spent when they receive the schedule before they leave their hometown. The following planning questions will help you prepare a work schedule:

- How much time will it take to accomplish the clearly defined task for this mission team?
- Is the work expectation realistic?
- Does the schedule include adequate rest breaks, devotion breaks, and time for lunch?
- Does the schedule include some supervised free time for shopping, sight-seeing, and recreation?
- Does the schedule include worship time with a host church?
- Does the schedule include “lights out” time?
- Does the schedule include times for detailed meetings or informational meetings, including an orientation when the volunteers arrive?

Volunteers do not respond to initiatives to stand around. They want to be busy and to contribute to your ministry. By making good use of a volunteer's time, you increase the value of the experience.

## **Who Pays for What?**

If there is any area of volunteer mobilization that can create bad feelings fast, it is money. Volunteers are not free. While you will have the benefit of free labor and expertise, there will be overhead costs to volunteers. Likewise, it costs a volunteer to respond to your request. Volunteers are glad to do that, but nobody likes surprises.

The best way to solve a problem is to avoid it. You avoid financial problems with clear up-front communication:

- Will lodging be provided for the volunteer in homes or at the church? If so, will there be a charge to the volunteer?
- Will volunteers need to stay in a local hotel or motel? If so, what will it cost the volunteer and what will be the rooming arrangement (i.e., how many volunteers to a room)?
- How many meals will the volunteer have to purchase while traveling and while on location?
- Will there be a “program fee” that covers, for instance, T-shirts for volunteers, honorariums for special speakers, or other expenses?
- Will the volunteer secure supplementary medical insurance? (Information is available through the North American Mission Board, 1 800 462-8657).
- Does the volunteer understand that any sight-seeing or recreational aspects of the trip will be at his/her expense?
- Will the volunteer have opportunities to purchase snacks? How much money might he/she need for that?
- Does the volunteer need to bring tools? Which tools?
- Who provides project materials?

The issue of materials is particularly important on church-building projects. Typically, the host will cover the cost of building materials, educational materials, crafts, and other needed items. If the volunteers are expected to help with material costs, that must be communicated early and reflected in the covenant.

As a volunteer host, you would be wise to prepare a budget for each mission. You might even want to share that budget with the mission team leaders of churches that respond to your project. A budget could help both you and the mission team leaders in the communication process.

## **Local Sites and Attractions.**

Volunteers like to see the area where they are serving. Seeing local landmarks, visiting museums, going to beaches and water parks, and shopping allows volunteers to see more of your community and what makes it unique. The more volunteers see, understand, and enjoy about your community, the more likely they will be to return and help again. Does this mean you have to be a tour guide? No. As a volunteer host, you can plan times of sight-seeing and recreation. With proper planning and directions, the mission team leaders may be able to handle getting the volunteers “around town:”

- Does the schedule allow for at least one free afternoon for sightseeing and recreation?
- What attractions in your area might volunteers enjoy?
- Will venues require advance reservations or ticket purchases?
- Can you provide maps for the mission team leaders?
- Can you or other church members go with the volunteers during their free time?
- Will the attractions in your area help the volunteer understand your local culture?
- If staying in a school, church, or camp facility, will the lodging facility be closed during free-time hours? When will it reopen? Will it be secure?

The free time activities you suggest to volunteers will vary with age groups. Adults might enjoy shopping, crafts, museums, or golf. Students would probably prefer more physical activities such as swimming, softball, or volleyball.

### **Proper Insurance Coverage.**

This may be one of the most unpopular topics for ministries. However, bad things do sometimes happen to good people while they are doing good things. It can create serious problems for everyone. An entity—church, association, state convention, or ministry—that invites volunteers to join them in ministry should consider having blanket liability and accident insurance policies:

- Have you evaluated the need for liability and accident coverage associated with your ministry?
- If you see a potential need, have you secured the liability and accident coverage?

There are risks associated in ministry. These risks should be calculated and minimized. However, these should not be obstacles to accomplishing the Acts 1:8 mission to which God has called us.

## Attachment - A

### Sample Mission Trip Covenant

Covenant between Host and Volunteer Builders Team or Individual

This covenant to partner in a short-term volunteer mission endeavor is between

(Host) \_\_\_\_\_ and  
(church or individual) \_\_\_\_\_.

**While inviting (church or individual) to join God in His activity in our community, (host church, missionary, or ministry) agrees to the following:**

1. To invite volunteers to join us in the fulfillment of God's call upon our life for ministry in this locale on **(date)**.
2. To have a clearly defined task for the volunteers.
3. To pray regularly for the volunteers and their preparation for the mission project.
4. To provide significant ministry for volunteers who come to work with us.
5. To be available to mission team leaders to make logistical decisions related to this project, particularly concerning issues of cost to the volunteer, such as housing, transportation, and food.
6. To provide all necessary materials for the accomplishment of the assigned task.
7. To be available to minister alongside volunteers during the week.
8. To assist volunteers in any emergency they may face.

**While participating in this mission trip, (church or individual) will seek to demonstrate our love for Christ and for others by agreeing to the following:**

1. To work diligently with our host to accomplish the defined ministry objective.
2. To pray regularly for the mission project, our hosts, and God's work in the community where we will serve.
3. To seek opportunities to share Jesus Christ with the people of the locale.
4. To prepare diligently before arrival for the ministry at hand.
5. To arrive on **(date)** and to depart on **(date)**.
6. To cover the following costs of this mission trip: **(list may include transportation, lodging, materials, food, etc.)**.
7. To abstain from the use of tobacco products, alcoholic beverages, or illegal drugs.
8. To maintain a safe environment for my fellow participants.
9. To not have possession of or use fireworks, firearms, or knives.
10. To follow the mission trip schedule.
11. To stay together as a mission team in the designated mission trip area.
12. To respect the privacy of others.
13. To maintain a clean environment.
14. To demonstrate a Christ-like spirit and concern for all people.
15. To be aware of our witness 24 hours a day.

**We have read the mission trip responsibilities listed above and agree to follow them.**

Host \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Mission Team Leader/Individual \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_