



Mission Trip Prep Essentials:

How to Get More Students and Adults to Sign Up



30+ YEARS OF CHRIST-CENTERED MISSION TRIPS

YOUTHWORKS.COM | 800-968-8504 | INFO@YOUTHWORKS.COM

INTRODUCTION

You are confident that service projects, mission trips, camps and other events are important to the faith formation of teenagers and to the greater arc of your student ministry. However, you are also well-aware that students and adults are chronically busy. And it is frustrating to pour time and energy into an event and then have two students show up... who then leave early because their friends aren't there. On top of that, you worry that a poorly attended event could have a domino effect and lead to poorly attended events in the future.

We get that struggle; we hear it from youth leaders all year long. So, based on cumulative experiences generated over many years, we created something that we think will help kickstart your imagination and get people on board. Most importantly, we will help you keep people engaged in your ministry events long after the initial excitement starts to fade.

This guidebook is divided into three chapters: attracting students, drawing in the best adults for the job, and keeping everyone engaged in the process from beginning to end. Don't miss the final epilogue, "Things to Avoid," where we share some lessons learned the hard way by other group leaders.

There are several ways to use this resource, but here are our suggestions:

- ▶ **Read each chapter on your own, with a friend in youth ministry or with a key leader from your ministry.** Each chapter is meant to spark your imagination for how to best recruit and retain students and adults. They are short and to the point, focused on practical ideas to help you see what is possible.
- ▶ **Reflect with the Prep and Processing Questions.** Spend a few minutes responding to the Prep and Processing Questions to help think through the application for your ministry. Use these questions to strategically invite students and leaders to your events.
- ▶ **First step, middle step, and last step: pray.** While this guidebook includes practical steps to get folks to sign up, remember that Christ is at the center. Start with prayer and don't stop praying for your students, leaders and your events.

Thanks for using this resource; we're cheering for you and your ministry!

YouthWorks

- CHAPTER 1 -

Getting Youth on Board

In a perfect world, you would make some announcements, put up a post on your youth ministry's Instagram, and you would have a full sign-up sheet. You've got some great events planned, c'mon now!

But we know it is not always that easy. This chapter is full of simple ideas to creatively share your excitement, nail down important logistics and strategize the best way to get students on board. Some of these ideas will resonate with your group and others might not work as well. You know your youth best, so use these points to spark your imagination and take it from there.

START EARLY

If you don't, summer sports programs, camps and a thousand other events will fill up students' calendars before they even hear a word about your great ideas. Get the word out about your event as soon as you can.

PURSUADE PARENTS

Youth are not your only audience – parents have a huge influence in their lives. Communicate, promote and cast vision to get buy-in from parents just as you do with youth. Parents will not necessarily know about the event just because you talked about it with your students; parents need direct, clear communication that emphasizes purpose, details, safety and strong leadership.

PROMOTE, PROMOTE, PROMOTE

Incorporate. Plant seeds by incorporating things about the event throughout the year. Going on a mission trip? Do some Bible studies around service. Doing a weekend retreat? Spend some time talking about the importance of deep friendships (that can be built by going to... camp!).

Share Stories. Stories can contain the best evidence of why your event is meaningful. Share stories of previous events, especially stories that communicate the impact and the 'why.' Better yet, have students who have been on similar events share about their previous experiences.

Cast Vision. Don't just look back. Look ahead to what being together can look like and what God could do in and through your group. Convey the purpose and significance of what you're inviting students into. Paint a picture worth following.

Upfront Promotion. Get the word out, loud and clear. Commit to doing a good job of advertising the event in a variety of places – announcements to the whole church, in your ministry, and all over social media. Use visuals along with your stories, like pictures from previous events or pre-existing promotional material from partner organizations.

In-Person Promotion. There is no better invitation than through face-to-face conversation. Let each student know in-person that you would love for them to come. Give them something tangible to remind them of the event and to share with their friends (and remember, digital things can be tangible!).

Leverage Relationships. Sometimes an invite from you will go 50% of the way – but an invite from a student or another leader can be more convincing. Create an informal ‘invitation team’ from your students and adult leaders and give them talking points, flyers or things to share on social media. Make sure to share an updated sign-up list with your leaders so they can be strategic. The more people who are talking about the event, the better.

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

Consider these tried-and-true recruitment tips from veteran youth leaders:

- ▶ **DECIDE ON DEADLINES.** Without a deadline, students will lack incentive to sign up in a timely manner. You don’t want to be scrambling to confirm numbers a week before the event. A well-tested word of advice is to create a flexible deadline, even if you are the only one that knows it is flexible. This allows for a grace period to accommodate latecomers, who are sometimes late because of reasons outside of their control.
- ▶ **INCENTIVIZE.** Having a good deadline does not guarantee that students will rush to sign up. Having incentives for the first students who sign up can be a gamechanger. Consider having prizes for the first five students who sign up, or employ a slightly different strategy and offer an incentive for those who sign up before a certain date.

Use things like “picking their seat in the van,” “controlling the radio,” “free T-shirts,” or “choose the free day option” as incentives. Again, you know your youth, so pick things that will build hype around signing up.

- ▶ **BLANK SIGN-UP SHEETS.** Avoid, avoid! Students will not want to sign up for an event if no one else is going. Talk with students ahead of time and get a few people to put their names down on the sign-up sheet before it goes to the whole group. Students are 1,000% more likely to sign up if they know they’re not the only one going.

You may even consider ditching the paper sign-up all together and doing an online form – think through how you can make it easiest for students to get their name down.

- ▶ **SOLIDIFY COMMITMENTS.** Once students say they want to be part of the event, help them commit. A great way to do this is by having them sign a covenant or registration form. You may also want to have them pay a deposit to reserve their spot. We know this can be tricky so we have a whole chapter on this later in the guidebook.

Getting Youth on Board

- PREP AND PROCESSING -

Use the following prompts to think through how this chapter applies directly to your ministry and what your next steps should be in recruiting for your events.

1. What is the major focus of your event or trip? What is the reason you want students to attend? Take a moment to pray and reflect on this if you feel unsure.
2. Where can you incorporate this into your regularly scheduled programming? Think through things like small group curriculum, Bible studies, Sunday school content, large group time, etc.
3. Stories can offer the most convincing evidence that something is meaningful. Who has good stories from previous events? If this is the first time you're doing this type of event, think through past stories and consider whether there are any stories that are still relevant? Write down some story ideas and potential storytellers.
4. Chances are good that you have some experience with upfront promotion of events. What has been most effective in the past?
5. What are ways you can encourage students and leaders to promote your event through word of mouth? What resources can you provide – flyers, social media posts, etc.?

6. Think about the parents in your group. How can you make sure information about your event gets to those people? Are there any people who may need extra buy-in or that you might want to reach out to personally?
7. This chapter listed several youth-leader-approved “tricks of the trade” to recruit students. Knowing your group, which of them would work the best?

The following questions might work well for a group discussion among youth staff or key leaders:

- What are some reasonable deadlines for your trip?
- What “early-bird” incentives will hype up your group?
- Who are students who are already on board and committed to your event?
Can you pre-sign them up?
- What is the best way for your students to sign up and commit?
Think about paper vs. digital sign-ups, registration forms, covenants and deposits.

Once you start getting students signed up, consider delegating tasks or leadership roles to them early in the preparation process. This will help motivate them to invest their energy and ideas, creating a buzz in the group that will attract other students.

- CHAPTER 2 -

Recruiting Quality Adult Leaders

A lot of recruitment strategies and tips in Chapter 1 can also apply to recruiting quality adults to lead at your event, or even in your student ministry. Recruiting the right adults to lead your students will play a big part in your group's overall experience.

Got a large pool of potential leaders? Critically think about who you will ask to participate in your various events. It can be helpful to consider which students are going and what leaders will best connect with those students.

This chapter includes ideas of what to look for, where to look, and how to ask adults to join your trip or event. While we have compiled some best practices for volunteer recruitment, make sure you know your ministry, church or denomination's guidelines and policies on volunteers.

ADULT LEADER PROFILE

You are looking for someone who is...

► **SAFE.** This is a non-negotiable. Leaders who are careless risk-takers or have bad judgment about safety issues are a liability to your students and your ministry. Having trust in the area of safety is a must, so make this qualification a prerequisite for any adult.

AN EXAMPLE. A title does not make someone a leader. Seek adults who are truly leaders by the example they set, particularly in their relationship with Jesus. Introduce students to leaders that are worth following.

► **RESPONSIBLE.** Following directions, staying on schedule, keeping track of students – these are just a few roles of adult leaders. Look for leaders who will shoulder these responsibilities well.

► **RELATIONAL.** Relationships are at the core of a healthy youth ministry experience. Relational leaders will connect with youth and help connect youth to each other in incredible ways.

- ▶ **KNOWN.** It is a great benefit to have leaders who are already in relationship with your youth. Look for leaders who are currently involved in your students' lives.
- ▶ **FLEXIBLE.** Unexpected circumstances are to be expected in youth ministry... and that's part of the adventure! Look for leaders who can bend without breaking and serve your students through adaptability.
- ▶ **ON BOARD.** It's hard to steer a ship when your crew keeps jumping overboard. Pick leaders who will buy into the vision of your ministry and support your leadership. Cast the vision and ask for commitment.
- ▶ **DIFFERENT.** Than you, that is. Think about how you will diversify your leadership team in areas of gender, age, culture, experience and personality type. Picking leaders who are different than you will compliment your leadership style and offer a better chance that all youth will connect with at least one leader.
- ▶ **IN PROCESS.** Just as it is for your youth, events and trips can challenge and grow your adult leaders. Without sacrificing your leadership standards, seek ways to stretch and develop adults as you give them new responsibility.

WHERE TO LOOK?

Youth staff. If you already have a team of volunteers or youth staff, they are an obvious first choice. Bring people who are already in relationship with your students.

Church staff. You may have a pool of people who have a passion for ministry at your church. Although youth ministry might be a step outside their normal path, invite pastors, elders, administrators and other staff to participate.

Parents. Serving and hanging out alongside a child can be a great blessing to parents and allow them to more fully buy in to the youth ministry.

Your congregation. You might find a young couple or a 70-year-old retiree...or anyone in between. Don't be bashful. You might be surprised at who says yes.

Past students. Check in with your graduates who are at least 20 years old. Consider past students who have the required maturity and responsibility.

Youth picks. Ask your students what adults they would like as leaders. They will choose adults who are already investing in their lives. You may just draft some incredible leaders this way.

Future volunteers. Who are the people you want to volunteer with the youth ministry? Coming on a trip or going to an event might get their feet wet, ignite their passion and build meaningful relationships, which will keep that person in ministry with your students. Ask them for a weeklong commitment, then invite them for more consistent involvement.

Youth workers. If you know other youth workers in town who are considering a similar experience, invite them to visit the event you have planned. You might gain a leader and they will gain an experience that could impact the future of their youth ministry.

HOW TO ASK?

Invite. Don't plead. Let them know that they are being offered something incredible and you would love for them to take part. Chances are you have some solid reasons that you would like their help – include those in your ask.

One-on-one. Most people would rather say yes to a personal invitation. Asking the entire congregation might be efficient, but consider who might say yes. How many of them really fit the Adult Leader Profile on the previous page? Take the time to intentionally invite specific people.

Give deadlines. Give potential leaders time to consider and pray about joining the trip or event while also giving them a deadline. Let them know you'll check back with them on a specific date – then keep that deadline and follow up. If they say no, you can switch gears and pursue another lead.

Pay for leaders. Paying for your leaders is one way to let them know they're appreciated. Work the cost of adult leaders into students' fundraising. This does not mean that adults shouldn't contribute to fundraising efforts, but knowing they are worth paying for sends a positive message about the value you place on their leadership.

Get commitments. Once a leader says yes, give them something to sign (our YouthWorks groups often use an Adult Leader Covenant) or provide some other way to make it official. It could be as simple as having them put their name on a list. Celebrate their commitment.

Recruiting adults for a YouthWorks mission trip? Once you have folks signed up, we have a great resource on equipping Adult Leaders for mission trips, available on your Trip Leader dashboard.

Recruiting Quality Adult Leaders

- PREP AND PROCESSING -

Use the following prompts to think through how this chapter applies directly to your ministry and what your next steps should be in recruiting for your events.

1. Let's get some numbers out of the way. How many adults do you want to bring? _____ (consider any required student-to-adult ratios for your event).
What's your minimum number? _____
Do you have a maximum? _____
2. Do you have any leaders who are already committed? If so, write their names here.
3. It's brainstorming time. Create your pool of potential leaders, and don't worry about if they'll say yes or no quite yet.

YOUR YOUTH STAFF	YOUR CHURCH STAFF	PARENTS	YOUR CONGREGATION
PAST STUDENTS	YOUTH PICKS	FUTURE VOLUNTEERS	YOUTH WORKERS

Remember, you are looking for adults who are safe, a positive example, responsible, relational, known, flexible, on board, different and in process. Put a star by each person that fits that description – and circle anyone who jumps out to you as an all-star.

4. Youth Picks – You may have never asked your students to put in some special volunteer requests. Knowing your ministry and your students, what is the best way to get their input on this?
5. If you have a large pool of people to begin with, and have a limited number of adult spots, strategically think through your people. Which of them exemplify the characteristics in the Adult Leader Profile the best?
6. Once you have identified the people you are most interested in asking, create some talking points that emphasize invitation and opportunity. The last thing you want is for people to feel obligated or coerced, so choose language and tone that communicates genuine interest without coming on too strong.
7. What does it currently look like for an adult to commit to volunteering with your youth ministry? Is there anything you would like to implement to make it more concrete or accessible?



- CHAPTER 3 -

Keeping Them Engaged and On Board

It's great to get people to sign up for your event, but it can be discouraging when only half of them show up. One often overlooked part of recruiting people is keeping them on board leading up to the event.

If you have ever been fishing, you know that it is one thing to get the fish hooked; it's another task to reel them in. Consider this next section of the guidebook the "reeling in" portion. This involves some strategy, so we have included a few tried-and-true solutions to keep interest high.

The first two points are geared towards events with some significant cost, so skip to "Maintain Engagement" if this does not apply to you.

DECIDE ON A PAYMENT STRUCTURE

Sometimes students back out when they see how much the trip or event will cost. By creating different payment deadlines, they (and their parents) will be able to see how it will be feasible to cover the cost. Some people may need a grace period, payment plan or scholarship, so consider how you will care for those with financial constraints.

FUNDRAISING

Good fundraisers build camaraderie and ownership, increasing the chance of people showing up to the final event. This topic is so large, it has its own guidebook! You should check that out later, but for now, we have a quick summary that hits the highlights:

- Fundraising Ideas – there are countless ideas of fun and effective fundraisers. The key is to pick the ones that work best for your group and your timeline.
- Timing – if you are doing fundraising events, get the dates out as soon as you can. As you know, calendars fill up.
- Communication – be clear about your expectations for fundraising. Are they required to attend fundraising events? Is everyone responsible to raise a certain portion of the trip? What happens if they don't reach their goal?

MAINTAIN ENGAGEMENT

After spending energy and effort to build excitement and cast vision about your event, don't let the momentum take a nose dive after people sign up. Here are ways to continue (and even build) the momentum leading up to your event.

Communicate. Share the details! Invite people to be excited about the next step in preparation along with you. Plan some strategic touchpoints leading up to the event. Tell them when plans change, where you are in preparation and what is coming next. It is especially important to keep your adult volunteers in the loop.

Encourage. Your excitement matters. Through email, texts, personal interaction and large group announcements, let students and adults know you are excited. Encourage them as they prepare for an awesome experience.

Involve. Bring students and leaders into the planning process. Look for places where they can take the reins and lead. This is the best way you can give people ownership of any plan. Got student leaders? We have a great resource for you at youthworks.com/student-leadership.

Meet. Sometimes you can pull random people from all corners of your community and throw them in an event together, achieving wonderful results. For some events, like a mission trip, being together before the event is crucial to your team's success. Meeting together will build relationships, keep students engaged and create positive expectations for the trip. We recommend that our YouthWorks groups have 3–6 meetings before the mission trip and we provide content to guide these meetings.

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

To get your mind going, here are a few tangible ways we have seen leaders involve their students with their mission trip plans:

- ▶ Let some students pick the destination for their next mission trip – some leaders let their senior class pick the destination, while others make this the focus of one youth group night.
- ▶ Invite students to share in front of the group and help recruit others. We already mentioned this, but it's so important that we listed it twice! Students are your best assets for building your numbers.
- ▶ Include students in logistical planning, like where you will stop during the road trip, which music you will listen to and what snacks you will buy.
- ▶ Encourage students to be involved in fundraising, even though it is tempting to let the adults take care of this. Have students sit at fundraising tables, bag groceries, wash cars... whatever you [or they] decide!

Now That They've Signed Up...

- PREP AND PROCESSING -

Use the following prompts to think through how this chapter applies directly to your ministry and what your next steps should be in recruiting for your events.

1. Does your group have issues with following through on sign-up commitments? Do you have any worries or bad past experiences with this?
2. This past chapter suggested several strategies to keep people engaged leading up to your event – were there any ideas around this that came to the forefront of your mind while reading this chapter? Write them down before they escape.

3. *If your event is free, skip these questions.*

Breaking up the cost of a trip and/or staggering the payment dates can help put the cost of your event into perspective. Take a moment to think through the financial details of your trip.

Is it reasonable for students or adult volunteers to pay the whole amount in one lump sum? If not, break the cost into 2 chunks. 3 chunks. 4 chunks. (We'll wait while you get your calculator.)

Now pick some dates from your calendar for payment deadlines and write them below. Include some incentive ideas for people who get their payment in on time.

What are some ways your ministry can support people who cannot financially afford the trip? What have you done in the past?

Your mind may have wandered to some fundraising ideas. Jot those down below and then check out our guidebook on fundraising for your trip.

4. As you move forward with your plans (and your excitement), it is important to communicate with your group. What are some things you will want to communicate regarding logistics, vision, excitement and general reminders?

While you're at it, throw some ballpark dates of when you would want to communicate this info. This is the start of your communication plan, which you can continue to flesh out over time.

Also, if any of this communication would be best for a meeting (or two... or six...), start jotting down ideas for that meeting – including some possible dates.

5. Chances are you are really excited and thankful that people have signed up for the event. Sometimes it's hard to put that excitement into words. Write out a quick pre-event thank-you note to your students and/or adults to gather your thoughts.

Like what you wrote? Consider sending a version to this to your students, parents or leaders.

6. This chapter listed several strategies for involving students and leaders in the planning process for your event. What are three intentional ways you can involve people or delegate tasks?

EPILOGUE: THINGS TO AVOID

While this guidebook has focused on things to do, there are a few things you should avoid when recruiting both students and leaders:

THE GUILT TRIP

Be positive and encouraging when you recruit students and adults. Do your best to help people know that they'll be missed if they don't come, but don't let the message be, "You're letting the group down by not going." As always, focus on building people up. Guilt trips will only serve to damage your ongoing relationships with students and leaders.

GIVING UP TOO QUICKLY

A quick "no" from someone might not be the final word. Check back with them. Maybe God is working on their heart. Maybe their schedule will change. Maybe they need to catch the vision for the event. And, if a student "can't go," double-check with their parent. Sometimes it's just a matter of getting parent buy-in.

BADGERING

There is a fine line between being persistent and being annoying. Be persistent! But also be conscious of how your attempts to encourage students and adults to sign up for the event are being perceived. Recognize when a "no" really is a "no."

OVERLOOKING PEOPLE

While it might be easy to target popular students who will sway the rest of the group, keep your outsider students in mind – the quiet ones, the hesitant ones, the frustrating ones. Trust that God can work in and through them, too. Think of which students these might be in your group and commit to pursuing their participation with the same energy you pursue the in-crowd.

With your adult volunteers, or even your potential ones, the story is the same: think through who would be a good fit for your group and don't be afraid to think outside the box.

GETTING DISCOURAGED

If, despite your best efforts, you don't get the numbers you were hoping for, trust that God can work in a smaller group just as much as a larger one. Be excited that you can focus more of your valuable attention on a few teenagers, and plan for the unique opportunities only a smaller group can provide.

BREATHE .

ACCEPT.

TRUST.

REPEAT.

This guidebook is full of ideas, suggestions and advice for how to do some quality recruiting for quality events. Yet even with generous amounts of thoughtfulness and energy, so much of student participation is out of our control. People change their minds, get sick, start a new job or a million other things. Rest in the confidence that you and your team did your best and trust that God will work in people's lives no matter what.

We hope this guidebook has been helpful and look forward to hearing more of your ideas as we continue to refine our resources. Thank you for walking this journey with us!



CHRIST-CENTERED

Mission Trips




*Trips Starting
at \$284*



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 800-968-8504