

Measuring Agency Partnership Potential Flagging 10 Collaboration Indicators by Ellen Livingood

This is the second of a two-part series offering some matrix questions for measuring missions potential. In the first article (Postings, September 2010), we offered 10 questions to help identify a church's potential for major expansion of missions involvement.

In this issue, we present 10 questions probing an agency's readiness to partner extensively with local churches. Because of the great diversity of partnerships, these criteria will not fit all situations equally. The questions are framed for an agency's self assessment, but they can also help churches determine their best agency match.

- 1. Is there clear evidence that our agency values churches as more than an income stream? Are we investing time, energy, and finances to develop church partners and involve them in multi-faceted, collaborative efforts?**



Our agency offers to partner with churches, but at the end of the day, that still means the church must get on board with our specific agenda. Church involvement is primarily monetary, and the major benefit to the congregation centers on financial stewardship.



Our agency takes seriously its belief that the local church, regardless of its faults and limitations, is God's agent in the world, and our parachurch organization is called alongside to provide professional resources and services. We are developing a track record of helping churches launch and maintain various types of partnerships with us, and with national and global partners. We are expanding the ways in which we can assist them to engage effectively.

- 2. Are we nurturing an ethos of church partnership at all levels of our organization—beginning with the CEO and including all headquarters staff, field leaders, and our ministry teams?**



Our staff often resist customizing procedures or adjusting requirements or systems to accommodate church partners. **Caution:** Such customization can be complex and costly in time and finances. If a church asks for special arrangements for a worker or project, it is wise to clarify the agreement in writing. Churches should be willing to cover related costs.



Our agency is proactively expanding the partnering skills of our missionaries and field colleagues. We offer facilitator training and encourage the adjustment of field systems to better serve partnerships. Our leaders at all levels urge workers to give priority time to serving partnerships, regardless of the short-term cost to our organization.

- 3. Do churches have a seat at the table when ministry decisions are made in our agency?**



Decision-making is in the hands of our field teams and/or our administrators because we believe that veteran missionaries and missions specialists are best able to determine appropriate courses of action. **Church caution:** If you wish to have input on decisions that impact your project or missionaries, clarify very specifically what decisions you want to speak into or what veto power you want to hold. Recognize that sending a worker under the auspices of an agency works best if the church assigns day-to-day field management to the agency, avoiding untenable situations where missionaries are caught between two conflicting authorities.



In light of the "from everywhere to everywhere" globalization of the missions force, our organization is revamping our strategies and organizational paradigms to accommodate greater diversity and collaboration of efforts with global partners of all kinds—sending-country churches, national churches, and various other partners from around the globe.



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4. Has our agency clearly defined who we are and what “value added” we can offer to church partnerships?



Our agency is focused solely on meeting field needs. We believe that our North American partners are there to serve, not to be served.



Because we want to be able to partner with any church, individual, or other entity, we are willing to go anywhere and do anything with our partners. **Caution:** Few agencies have the competence to function well in every global setting. Those without boundaries are likely to be stretched too thin to provide quality leadership and services to partners.



We believe that our mandate includes expanding local churches' capacity for high-impact global engagement. Therefore, we are investing in mobilization personnel, tools, and programs to serve church leaders, missions leadership teams, children, teens, and the congregation as a whole in order to unleash God-given gifts to reach the world today and in succeeding generations.

5. Has our agency established multiple ways to listen and respond to the desires and concerns of local churches, both in our sending country and on the field?



Our interaction with churches is limited. Our leaders speak in churches, but we do not have any systematic way to collect input from local congregations in those settings or any others. We trust most of our communication with churches to our missionaries, but we do not train/resource them for that task nor gather feedback about churches from them.



Our organization values good listening and perceptive observation of the broader church scene. We set up regular face-to-face times for honest dialog with church leaders—in leadership forums, advisory councils, and/or focus groups held around the country. We prioritize taking time to rub shoulders with church leaders in a wide variety of settings, more often going as learners than as speakers.

6. In what concrete ways is our agency constantly working to improve our communication with churches?



Our agency encourages workers to keep in touch with their churches, but there are no efforts to maintain standards of frequency or quality. Training is limited to a brief session at our candidate orientation. Our website and publications seldom highlight churches or church opportunities except in terms of financial giving.



Because our agency understands the power of narrative, in print and electronic media we feature the stories of local churches involved in effective partnerships. Our missionaries are taking an online webinar on how to use social media. We are partnering with church media teams which go to the field to capture stories for their congregation and for use in our wider context.

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7. Are our workers so passionate about a bigger-than-themselves vision that they welcome even “amateurs” to participate? Do they communicate their vision frequently and clearly, and create opportunities for church involvement?



Our workers have high ministry standards and are reticent to use short termers who have little or no cross-cultural and language skills. We prefer to concentrate on our own work and “limit damage” by collaborating only with professional colleagues and nationals.



Our organizational ethos can tolerate some failures that occur when using short termers, although we also have instituted training systems to help prepare teams coming from our partner churches. Our workers' investment in vision-casting and training of their partner churches is viewed as an essential element of their missionary calling. They measure success by the growth of partnering churches as well as field ministry.

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8. Does our agency view missionary care as an important responsibility, one to be shared by both church and agency?



Our agency believes that our role is to handle all matters concerning our missionaries in strict confidentiality. We do not share this information with anyone, not even the sending church, unless the missionary chooses to share it.



Missionary care is the responsibility of field leaders. While the overlap of supervisory and care-provider roles can be awkward, our agency lacks the staff to provide much on-field care from other sources.



Our agency takes very seriously the role of sending churches to provide pastoral nurture and oversight for their members. We provide or suggest

specialized training for church counselors to better understand and minister to the unique needs of their missionaries.

9. **Does our agency consistently require accountability on all levels, helping members to measure progress toward clearly defined goals while recognizing that ultimately all Kingdom expansion is by God's grace? Do we work with our personnel and sending churches to clarify and fulfill missionaries' multiple accountability relationships (sending church, other donors, agency leaders, field leadership, national church/organization, etc.)?**



We encourage missionaries to set personal goals but each worker is ultimately accountable only to God.



Each member and team in our organization establishes objectives. Workers are regularly evaluated by their supervisors based on these mutually agreed-upon goals. That assessment is provided automatically to sending churches and to other supporting churches as requested.

10. **Is a commitment to lifelong learning and a willingness to constantly adapt to changing opportunities**



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built into our expectations of every member of our agency?



Participation in various types of learning opportunities is a priority for each member while on the field and on home assignment. Flexibility is modeled, highlighted, and applauded.

Red flags do not mean that an agency is automatically eliminated as a potential partner. However, these factors need to be carefully discussed when churches and agencies are pursuing closer affiliation, whether it is sending a new worker or launching a project or more complex partnership initiative.

Each agency and church will weigh some factors as far more important than others. An honest discussion of the relative importance of various questions can give each potential partner insights into the values and priorities of the other. While these questions can be used as a measure, they may be most helpful as a means of identifying key areas of growth.

Catalyst's "[Sending New Missionaries](#)" package includes 27 "Church Questions for Selecting a Mission Agency" related to sending new workers.

Ellen Livingood launched Catalyst Services in 2005 to further church/agency collaboration. She is available to help your church or agency work through these questions and/or develop a customized matrix to evaluate potential partners.



Interchange Postings

Catalyst's *Postings* e-newsletter is a monthly publication designed for mission agency personnel and local church leaders involved in collaborative global efforts. The practical articles highlight what church and agencies are doing to mobilize believers, especially those of younger generations, to expand the Kingdom.

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