

Start Here

First steps to ministry
with least-reached peoples

Reaching out to people from a different culture is truly “foreign” to many Christians and often seems too intimidating to even try. How do church leaders help people get past their fears?

This issue of *Postings* highlights two types of programs offering put-your-toe-in-the-water introductions to unreached peoples.

Exposure Weekends

Enjoying a conversation with Hmong shop owners? Eating exotic Somali food from a communal plate? Astounded as you watch idol worship in a Hindu temple? If so, you might assume that you're on a missions trip to the other side of the globe. But you could be in an Explore program in Minneapolis!



Explore programs are 2-, 3-, or 5-day experiences run by [Engage Global](#) from their center in one of Minneapolis' very multi-cultural neighborhoods. Beginning with the initial orientation session, the 10-20 participants in each Explore group are involved in highly interactive learning.

Explore is designed so that contact with immigrants and refugees in Minneapolis will be a springboard to passion for these peoples in their homeland.

After helping to connect the global thread running throughout Scripture, they diagram the Great Commission and then plunge into an intense cultural

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simulation experience. The activity exposes how easily people interpret others through their own cultural lenses. As program leaders explain the layers of the culture onion—behaviors, values, beliefs, and worldview—participants discover they haven't even peeled back the initial behaviors layer in their cross-cultural interactions.

Then it's off to the Hmong or Somali market. Each person is given money for lunch and to buy some type of cultural or religious artifact. Spending money in restaurants and shops ensures that future groups will also be welcomed there. When the group returns, they debrief, share about the artifacts they purchased, then pray for the unreached peoples from the religious blocs represented. A large map helps to visualize the homelands of these peoples.

Explore has successfully involved those as young as fifth grade (fifth-eighth graders must be accompanied by a parent) and as old as 86.

The greatest benefit occurs for churches where the Explore experience is tied into the overall missions goals of the church.

Hill Country Bible Church anticipates sending eight groups to Explore this year. The program was first scouted by Rick, their missions pastor. Impressed, he and other lead-



ers decided to have all ministry staff participate so that every level of the church—from children to seniors—catches this vision of the world. Another church is making Explore a prerequisite for all college students joining their short-term teams. They believe it will lay a crucial missions foundation.

Explore is designed so that contact with immigrants and refugees in Minneapolis will be a springboard to passion for these peoples in their homeland. The emphasis is on both the big picture and on long-term engagement with unreached peoples globally.

Engage Global was birthed by Rick Davis whose years of experience working with refugees in the US and unreached peoples in Southeast Asia provided a rich backdrop for the development of this mobilization experience. Several other couples are part of the core ministry team, and they are aided by a number of volunteers, many of whom are themselves headed overseas. When they began, the team assumed that the Explore ministry would serve regional churches, but groups fly in from all over the US to participate. Plans are now developing to expand it to another major city.



[+] [global frontier missions](#) [Global Frontier Missions](#) (GFM) offers very similar exposure

opportunities with their **Global Missions Tour** (1 day) and **Global Missions Journey** (3 day). Both programs are available in Atlanta, Houston, and Richmond. Director Grant Hayes explains that the goal is for participants to catch God's

heart for the nations and identify their role in it—praying, giving, going, welcoming, etc.



Their program varies a bit depending on what is happening in the refugee/immigrant communities served by

their longer-term staff. Journey participants can sometimes participate in one of the on-going programs. Prayer walking and ethnic mapping are always included, as well as some contextualized evangelism training and an introduction to sharing the gospel in honor/shame cultures.

An added aspect of GFM programs is that 30% of the registration fee is forwarded to a church-planting team among unreached peoples, or to a Bible translation or JESUS film project, etc. The benefitted ministry is discussed during the program with the goal of sparking a vision for God's work among the nations and even potentially, ongoing support. GFM also hopes that churches that participate in these 1- and 3-day programs will send longer-term workers back for their Missionary Training School.

Sparking a vision for God's work among the nations...

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Ministry-Immersion Weeks

A second way to introduce people to the nations is ministry-immersion experiences among diaspora communities. In these programs, participants are trained in a few outreach techniques and then practice them with peoples of other cultures. Confidence grows as they learn basic questions to launch dialog with someone of another ethnic group.



[International Project](#) (IP) of New York City

runs what they call **Seed Weeks** throughout the year. Participants are introduced to hands-on ministry with immigrants and refugees in New York's amazingly diverse boroughs. The long-term goal is to overcome fear and other barriers, and also to identify spiritually interested people who can be followed up by those in IP's longer training program and church-planting work.

Each team receives a packet of materials prior to the trip to help them prepare for their time in New York City. Once on-site, mornings are filled with training, role play, and coaching. Each day, participants learn one new tool to connect cross culturally. Then after prayer, they head out to engage people in the way they were trained. The initial day introduces very simple techniques to just initiate a conversation.

Many people are so fearful that simply launching a cross-cultural conversation constitutes a major success.

Each day adds to participants' communication abilities. During the week they learn to effectively share a very brief testimony. They also learn how to identify "people of peace" who can be door openers to others in their ethnic community. Each evening the groups gather to debrief. They share great stories and hard stories. One of the underlying themes is "You are not allowed to be discouraged. There is no failure."

"We want them to leave here with a love for the foreigner among us," explains Director Kevin King. "Our goal is that they gain confidence to be able to engage a person of another faith and share with them spiritually at a simple level."

Kevin and his wife Jeanne have ministered to internationals in New York City for two decades. Their goal is to make the learning curve much easier for others. International Project

now has an expanding staff who run both Seed Weeks and their 10-month Equip training program. Some of those who are trained stay on to continue establishing churches among ethnic groups representing peoples that are unreached and much less accessible in their home countries.

We want them to leave here with a love for the foreigner among us.

The program's high impact is confirmed by Andy Edwards, pastor of missions and evangelism at Bridgeway Church in Oklahoma City, OK.

Andy and his wife scoped out the Seed Week program last fall, then he returned with a team of 11. "It was phenomenal because 80-90% of the people we encountered were not originally from the US. We got a taste for the world, and particularly for

unreached people groups," he explains.

"The training was amazing but the best part was going out and doing it," he continues. "We learned how to turn the conversation from the natural to the spiritual. This training, coupled with powerful times of prayer, made us bold. Even our people who started out really terrified were, by the end of the week, able to have conversations at the mall or on the street. One proof of the program's impact was that on the flight to New York, none of us shared the gospel on the airplane. On the flight home, every single member of our team shared the gospel with someone!"



[Global Gates](#) also offers immersion trips that they call **Sifting Weeks**. Similar in purpose and focus to the IP program, Sifting Weeks involve participants in "sifting" to find people who are hungry to know more about Jesus. The program is offered in New York City and the San Francisco area. A similar 3½ day program called **Engaging the Nations** will be introduced this summer in the DC metro area.

If your ministry offers similar exposure or immersion programs and you would like to let others know about them, visit our "[Start Here—Close to Home](#)" blog and describe your program in a comment at the bottom.

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Churches—Start Here



1. **Discuss with your team.** Many churches want to prioritize sending longer-term workers to the unreached. But they struggle to instill that vision into their people because their short-term trips only go to more-reached areas of the world. Discuss with your leaders how the type of experiences highlighted in this *Postings* could ignite your congregation's vision for the spiritually dark places around the globe.
2. **Explore the opportunity.** Send one or two people from your church to test drive one of these programs. First-hand evaluation is the best way to see if it is a fit for your church.
3. **Make it the norm.** Identify which members of your congregation would benefit from participating in an exposure/immersion experience like this. Where could it be built into your church's short-term missions program?
4. **Initiate in your city.** Several of the programs highlighted here are expanding to new cities. If you would like to have this type of ministry opportunity nearby, talk to the leaders to see if you could host their program. Invite other churches in your region to work with you in this effort.

Agencies—Start Here



1. **Collaborate.** Many of these programs welcome the collaboration of mission agency personnel. Agency staff can walk through the experience with people they bring and highlight UPG ministry opportunities their organization offers around the world. Talk to program leaders about this option of working together. Your personnel can enrich the experience for participants and expand long-term relationships at the same time.
2. **Recommend.** Inform your field workers, especially anyone focused on unreached peoples, about these programs. (You can forward this *Postings*.) Suggest that they urge their churches to participate. It's a great way to expand the vision and understanding of their support base!
3. **Send appointees.** Suggest that new workers participate in one of these programs and take leaders from their sending church with them. All will learn techniques for engaging people with the unreached. Appointees may be able to replicate some of the learning process as they build their support base with other churches.

Read our related *Worth Considering* blog entitled, "[Start Here—Close to Home.](#)"

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