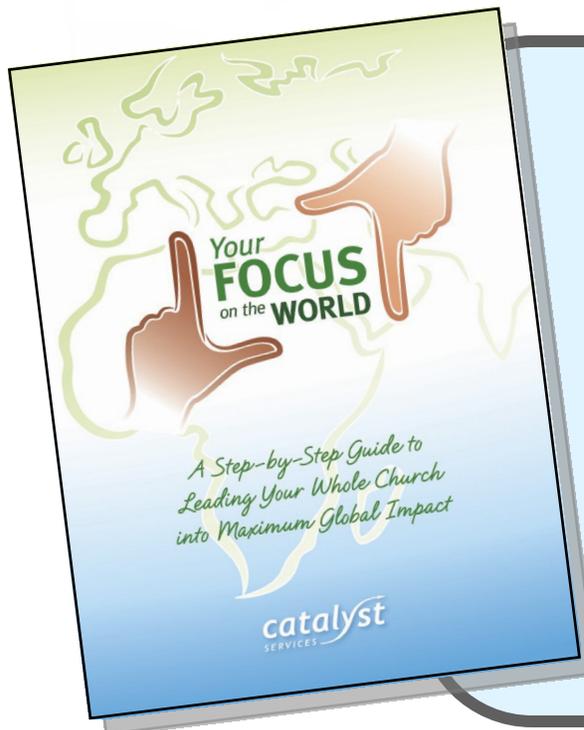


Your FOCUS on the World

Chapter 10 — Send a Survey Team



Diverging from *Postings*' usual practice of bringing you a complete article, this month and next we are providing a taste of the information compiled in the new manual, *Your FOCUS on the World*.

The *Your FOCUS on the World* manual is designed to:

- ✓ Lead churches to DISCOVER their missions potential, SELECT the right partners, and IMPLEMENT a successful, cross-cultural initiative (referred to as a FOCUS: First priority, Objectives oriented, Cooperative, Unleashed resources, Strategic).
- ✓ Help churches already involved in a global initiative to strengthen their partnerships and their church's excitement and involvement.
- ✓ Serve as a practical tool mobilizers can use to guide churches in expanding cross-cultural effectiveness.

In this issue, we have chosen highlights from chapter 10 on how to field a survey team. The manual is full of real-life stories of churches, and we begin with part of the story of Village Church. Next is a small section of the practical guidelines, and last, a sample from the list of potential questions a survey team could use to analyze on-the-ground opportunities.

See the end of this article for ordering information for the manual and related resources.

VILLAGE CHURCH

This multi-ethnic church of 1,800 in Portland, OR, has over a decade of experience in building partnerships with national churches around the globe. Now as they approach new FOCUS opportunities, they know the essential questions.

“Where have you come from?”

At the outset, they inquire about the state of the church there. Does it exist? If so, what is its nature? Is it strong? Is it dwindling? What were the factors that affected its expansion or precipitated its decline?

A thriving church might not need what Village could offer, but in other cases a partnership could help it multiply. Struggling churches don't necessarily want help or might not need the type of assistance Village could provide.

Taking the time to ask about past partnership experience is crucial to understanding potential partners, Village has dis-

covered. What is their history of working with foreigners? Village knows that on-site leaders who have felt betrayed or controlled in previous associations will naturally be reticent to trust others again.

Inquiring about the past shows respect for the individual and a humble desire to learn. If there have been past hurts, Village recognizes they must invest more time than usual in building relationships and gaining trust.

When they inquire respectfully about misunderstandings in prior relationships, they often uncover cultural landmines that the previous partner unwittingly exploded. They recognize these as areas where they need to work harder to understand the perspective of their potential partners.



“Where is God leading you?”

Other questions relate to the present and future: Where is your church strong? Where is it weak? What would you like to see happen in the next 10 years? How do you want to develop as a leader? How might we as your brothers and sisters in Christ be of help?

Village does not partner with a church that just wants money. One of their bedrock beliefs is that to reach the whole world, it will take the global church working together, not just financially but in personnel, ideas, equipment, etc.

If on-site church leaders initially indicate that they just want funding, discussions go deeper. Usually there are other needs, but the local leaders may feel linking partners wouldn't understand the importance of their priorities or be willing to provide practical assistance. Sometimes they fear the linking partner will take control or has a desire to plant cloned versions of itself. None of these is

Village's intention, but it takes time to help prospective partners understand that their commitment is to serve—

**Looking for neglected opportunities**

When Village began to consider their first FOCUS, it was at a time when much missions attention was centering on the recently divided Soviet Union and on China.

They decided to see if

there were important gaps in other, less-publicized but needy locations. God pointed their attention to India. There they found a Christian well connected to leaders throughout their potential FOCUS area. His help on their survey trip was invaluable. As they met dozens of local people, they looked for major needs that matched their resources.



Find the rest of Village's story in the FOCUS manual!

Survey Trip Guidelines

If at all possible, you will want to schedule a survey trip before you make a final FOCUS selection. Nothing beats seeing things first hand and having face-to-face discussions. While some churches are reticent to invest the funds for a trip that is designed for research and relationship building rather than for ministry, the benefits of spending the money to lay a solid foundation cannot be overestimated.

WHAT COULD A SURVEY TRIP ACCOMPLISH?

Before you read further, discuss what you think a survey trip to visit your potential FOCUS ministry site could accomplish.

It will be important to consult with your on-site hosts and potential partners to understand what they think could be accomplished through this initial visit.

SETTING SPECIFIC TRIP GOALS

Your team may take only the first steps in many of the following areas on your survey visit. How much you can accomplish will depend on many different factors. A good beginning opens the door to continue the dialog and planning after you return.

Build relationships

In chapter 9, you were introduced to a number of heart attitudes and cultural barriers to in-depth relationships. Before your survey team heads off on this trip, you will want to review those factors.

Take time to do some reading about crossing cultures. “To Catch the Wind” is a brief article in the [online resources](#) that introduces the subject well. *The Beauty of Partnership*, *Foreign to Familiar*, and *Serving with Eyes Wide Open* are excellent helps to better understand how you will be perceived and to avoid some of the common pitfalls.

The West's task orientation is not shared by the rest of the world. In most cultures, friendships are far more valuable than accomplishing work. This doesn't mean that you should abandon schedules and goals. In fact, one of the contributions Westerners bring to partnership efforts with non-Westerners is their ability to define what needs to be done and move toward significant accomplishment.

However, “efficient” effort must be based on solid relationship. Without the foundation of friendships anchored on sincere mutual respect, your partners may verbally agree to goals and plans because they don't want to appear rude by disagreeing, but little will actually be accomplished. Ask someone familiar with the culture of the people you will visit to help you understand the value and marks of relationship in that particular cultural environment.

Identify an enthusiastic and qualified FOCUS facilitator

You have already reviewed some characteristics about the FOCUS facilitator in chapter 9, but confirming the availability of a good facilitator and her “match” for your church and your FOCUS are key assignments for the survey team. Review the profile sheet with your prospective facilitator, noting areas that your church feels are strategic.

Dialog honestly about the expectations and time demands. While accepting this role will require a significant investment



for this person, you will want to make sure that it also expands his ministry capacity. Plan to spend extended time talking about how the FOCUS will impact the facilitator and her individual ministry as well as the overall work of God in this place. Probe how your church can be a blessing to this pivotal person.

In some cases, the best scenario will be to have multiple people share the facilitator role. While this provides a broader range of gifts, it also complicates the process. You will want to be sure that everyone understands his role and is eager to be a part of the team.

If you do not identify a good facilitator match, God may be indicating that this is not the right FOCUS for your congregation at this time. Don't be discouraged. If He closes one door, He will open another.

Catch or strengthen a vision for what God is doing/wants to do there

When short-termers drop into an unfamiliar missions setting, one of two reactions is typical: Either they superficially assess the situation and decide they know immediately what needs to be done, or they become overwhelmed and succumb to discouragement and a sense of hopelessness.

Remember that God has promised to build His church, and Jesus said that when the church moves forward to claim new ground for His Kingdom, even the gates of Hades will not be able to overcome it (Matt. 16:18). God has both plans and power. If you are taking your marching orders from Him, you don't need to be fearful or despairing.

God needs people prepared to see with eyes of faith and sensitivity how He is working, even though the methods may be totally unfamiliar. Ask God to give you a fresh perspective of what He wants to do in and through your church in this time and place.

Begin by focusing on the positives. It is easy to be absorbed by the deficits, but you will want to start by identifying what *is* available in terms of manpower, resources, and vision. These strengths are God-given to accomplish the task. As outsiders, your church should never do what the local believers can do (almost always better) themselves.

The grace of giving (2 Cor. 8:7) is a virtue God wants to build into every believer. Never assume your partners, regardless of their financial neediness, have nothing to give. The Apostle Paul uses the Macedonian believers as illustra-

tions of those who gave with "rich generosity" even though it was out of "extreme poverty" (2 Cor. 8:2).

Listen intently to understand the vision, perspective, and goals of potential partners

Listening in any context takes effort, but cross-cultural listening is particularly challenging. Your survey team will need to increase their listening skills before this journey.

Start by reading or rereading chapters 9 and 13 of this manual and several of the books in the  **online resource** list including *Cross-Cultural Partnerships* by Mary Lederleitner and *Building Strategic Relationships* by Daniel Rickett—especially if you will be partnering directly with nationals.

Oscar Muriu, pastor of Nairobi (Kenya) Chapel, cautions, "Two things that are great gifts in the [American] context become a curse when you go into missions. One is that Americans are problem-solvers. Americans come to Africa, and they want to solve Africa. But you can't solve Africa. The continent is much too complex for that. And that really frustrates Americans.

"And the assertiveness you are taught in school becomes a curse on the field. I often say to American missionaries, 'When the American speaks, the conversation is over.' The American is usually the most powerful voice at the

table. And when the most powerful voice gives its opinion, the conversation is over."

So, it is all about listening, listening, listening. Do you have someone in your church who can help you build skills in listening and/or cross-cultural communication? A counselor, business trainer, former missionary, or someone with a sociology background might help.

Gather the answers to "Field Assessment Questions"

Before leaving on your survey trip, you will want to finalize a list of questions. Sample questions are included at the end of this chapter, but you will want to add, eliminate, and prioritize to create a customized list for your situation.

These types of questions are challenging to answer. Grappling with them will deepen your understanding of needs/opportunities, strategies, and on-the-ground capacity.

Balance planning with spontaneity. These questions are designed to help you conduct an in-depth, rational analysis of the current situation and potential partnership direction. However, anticipate that your potential partners' approach may be far less analytical and far more spontaneous. Their more process-oriented style is deeply rooted in culture and is reinforced by the reality that things seldom go as planned.



"Facilitators must understand how to empower others, not just do everything themselves. Communication skills are essential, and they must be able to handle the stress of bringing different worlds together."

Allison Schroeder, World Relief



Your church should never do what the local believers can do (almost always better) themselves.

This does not mean that you should not plan. Good cooperation demands good planning. At the same time, appreciate and value your hosts' spontaneity and with your hosts, be open moment by moment to the leading of the Spirit.

Discuss with your FOCUS facilitator how she thinks you can keep these opposite viewpoints in a healthy tension. Build into your plans plenty of latitude for lots of change!

Brainstorm ways you could work together

Discovering God-created matches between your congregation and the ministry is one of the most exhilarating parts of your trip, and it is an important way God will confirm what and where He wants you to FOCUS. If you don't see unplanned connections that reveal His fingerprints, maybe you need to look elsewhere. But if your excitement is mounting, keep going!

Sit down with your facilitator and partner(s) and tell them about your DNA. List the types of skills and expertise in your church. Share your ministry passions and experience. Pray together. Do pieces begin to fit together in fascinating possibilities?

Articulate non-negotiables and surface hidden expectations for all potential partners

A skilled facilitator is extremely helpful in assisting all parties to speak honestly about their needs and aspirations for the FOCUS partnership. Before your survey group leaves home, your missions team should have worked on a list of requirements and expectations, but most likely there will be other concerns that surface during your visit that you will not have previously considered.

Advice from your facilitator will likely adjust your thinking in some crucial areas. A good rule of thumb is to be graciously honest and as flexible as possible.

Listen well. In some cultures, being forthright about expectations is uncomfortable, and it will be important to create an atmosphere in which honesty is safe. Particularly in Majority World situations, Westerners are perceived to hold all of the power, largely because they control the flow of funds. Here is an opportunity to emphasize that partners are equal and each has something to give and to get. Your dialog might include asking each person to pick two of the following sentences to complete for the group:

- "From my/our perspective, our FOCUS will be successful if..."
- "The greatest danger to the FOCUS initiative from my viewpoint is...and in order to avoid/solve it, we should..."
- "The most difficult FOCUS involvement the other partner(s) expect of me/us is... because..."

Encourage others in the group to respond to what is said and use the process to clarify expectations, reservations, and questions. Someone should take excellent notes.

Do not be surprised if non-Western participants are not totally forthright during your first several visits. Because of cultural reticence or bad experiences in the past, they may need to see evidence that you really value their



"Our FOCUS project has mushroomed way beyond what we originally envisioned. God writes His own story and you try to keep up."

Tom Theriault, Solana Presbyterian

contribution before they will let down the barriers. They may express crucial viewpoints by means of stories and/or subtle body language.

From the outset, determine that you will commit the time and effort to do everything you can to truly understand the hearts of your partners. This means

coming as sincerely humble learners. Rely on your facilitator to be the spokesperson or interpreter. Ask God to make you sensitive and teachable.

Discuss a practical timetable for partnering

Timing may play a major role in the success of a FOCUS and indicate whether this is God's place right now for your church's priority involvement. Some issues for discussion:

- If your facilitator is an expat, what is the schedule for his being out of the country on home assignment or otherwise preoccupied? If this key person anticipates being out of pocket for six to 12 months within the next two or three years, what would that do to FOCUS momentum? Is there someone else to take her place during those months of absence?
- If a major project is a chief part of your FOCUS, when will your partners be ready to begin various stages? Does that match your anticipated schedule?
- Is there a particular time of year for short-term trips? For example, if you envision fielding a lot of teachers during summer months, make sure that this season is a good time for the field to host them.
- How long do you envision the FOCUS lasting? It is often better to commit to a phase—say three to five years with the possibility of renewal—than to sign on for an undetermined duration. Be realistic about the length of time your church is ready to commit for a first phase and the time frame needed for the FOCUS to be successful.

This survey-trip chapter goes on to cover:

- Who should go?
- How long should the trip be?
- Can we research multiple options on the same trip?
- How should we prepare?
- Clarifying decision-making authority
- The survey team report



"When the American speaks, the conversation is over."

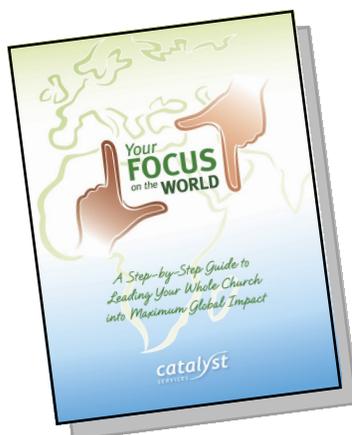
Oscar Muriu, Nairobi Chapel

Sample "Field Assessment Questions"

1. What are the core needs and opportunities?
2. How is God at work here? Is there evidence that His Spirit is moving in a particular way?
3. What is the urgency of this opportunity?
4. What are the major obstacles?
5. Is there a clear plan of action? What is it?
6. What are the desired outcomes? Short term? Long term?
7. How will the results be measured?
8. Is the plan big enough to impact the need?
9. Is there a clear model of success?
10. What other churches or organizations are committed to this effort? What will they contribute?
11. Do other partners need to be recruited in order to increase the likelihood of success? If so, who, and what role would they have?
12. How dependent is the plan on outside support? Can it be replicated locally without ongoing financial investment or other resources from us or other linking partners?

A total of 27 questions are included in the manual, supplemented with other online resources.

Ordering Information for *Your FOCUS on the World*



The *Your FOCUS on the World* manual is currently available at a special introductory rate of \$19.99 plus \$8.50 S/H to US addresses. (Contact us about Canadian or overseas orders.) Included with book purchase is access to a host of **ONLINE RESOURCES** for use in your church. These resources include informative articles, samples from churches, and customizable forms.

Once you have purchased the *Your FOCUS on the World* manual for the leader, you will have the option of purchasing **DOWNLOADABLE COPIES** for your group or a **CHURCH RESOURCES PACKAGE** including personalized phone coaching for your leader. An **IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE** including just the second half of the manual will be available soon for churches looking to improve existing global initiatives.

Interested in becoming a **FOCUS FACILITATOR**? Training workshops providing an extensive set of facilitation resources are being offered. Four sessions are scheduled this May/June in various locations.

For more **INFORMATION** about *Your FOCUS on the World*, as well as details on **ORDERING** the manual and related resources, facilitator training, etc., follow the link on the [Catalyst Services](#) home page.

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