

POSTINGS

articles for missions mobilizers

Exit Strategy

How can a church end a global initiative well?

by Ellen Livingood

We all love to start new things. So when we talk about global initiatives, the bulk of our attention is given to how to get off to a good start. But we also need to stay the course and then end well. In most cases, churches and their partners should have an ending plan in mind before they begin. Yet until recently, exit strategies were seldom given much thought. Experience has confirmed their value.

This issue of *Postings* offers some suggested elements of exit strategies as well as some guidelines for a local church to navigate successfully through the process of ending well.

But first, let me address the question of what does and doesn't end.

Relationships

Personal relationships grounded in mutual trust and brotherly love are essential to effective partnership. These relationships need to be built **before** a strategic initiative is created.

Relationships usually should also continue **after** the initiative concludes. Majority world partners almost always value strong relationships over accomplishing tasks. So they are baffled and hurt when Westerners abandon friendships just because tasks have been completed.

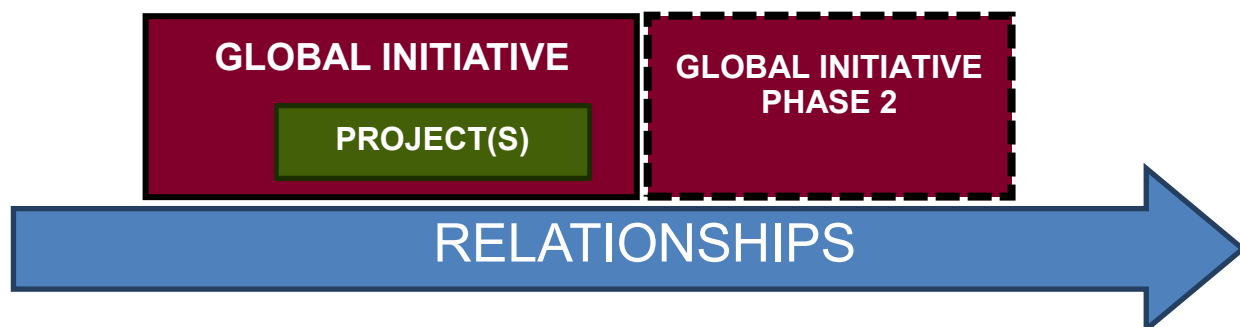
Initiatives

Once relationships of trust are established, a strategic initiative can be developed. In Catalyst, we call this a FOCUS, but here we will use the more common terms, initiative or partnership. These initiatives are almost always more successful if they are launched with (1) clear, shared goals and (2) a specific timeframe. Energy and involvement dissipates if initiatives are vague and open ended.

I generally suggest a three-to-five year timeframe—long enough to get something done but short enough to carry a sense of urgency. When time parameters are established, all partners understand that commitments to active involvement, especially funding, are finished at the end of that period. However, as needed a phase 2 can be launched to continue the initiative, perhaps in a new direction.

Projects

Within the framework of the larger initiative, various projects can be launched. These usually involve partners contributing various types of resources to achieve very concrete outcomes. They may be efforts that are accomplished fairly quickly.



Elements of a Good Exit Strategy

As your church designs a global initiative, you will want to include a clear exit strategy from the beginning. This strategy may need to be amended as your initiative evolves to fit changing realities. An annual review is wise.

Here are some guiding questions.

1. Clear vision.

What is the overarching purpose all partners believe God is calling us to accomplish via this initiative? Do we have practical metrics to measure our progress? A clear vision helps us pray specifically, work intentionally, and celebrate all God does.



2. Specific secondary goals. What smaller, more specific goals have we agreed we want to accomplish together during this initiative? Again, how will we measure them? Have we defined how the partners together can amend these, if necessary, as our partnership progresses?

3. Timeframe. Have we established a definite ending time for this initiative, or is there some other specific termination point?

4. Possibility of continuation. Might the partners be open to consider the possibility of a “phase 2” when this initiative ends, or will the partnership definitely conclude as outlined above? This item is sure from the outset that they will not renew involvement in the initiative.

5. Risk reduction. What do partners need to do to avoid a breakdown that would put the initiative at risk of dissolving prematurely? Are there ways to build resilience into our partnership? Would it be helpful to discuss potential show stoppers with our partners now?

6. Post-initiative sustainability.

Have we carefully planned how ongoing projects will be sustained after our initiative is complete? Building this sustainability will almost certainly take longer than expected—likely multiple years. Have we and our partners committed to begin developing local resources from the beginning? Establishing a schedule to step down our support may help

this become a reality. Have we agreed to periodic check-ups that include honest dialog to see how sustainability is progressing? Have we considered getting coaching for ourselves and our partners to do this well?

7. Leadership development. If appropriate, does our plan provide for the development and training of local leaders who can continue to build on the efforts we launch in this initiative?

8. Criteria for ending well.

What other elements will be essential in order to agree that our initiative has ended well? The list might include items like: concluding with an assessment by a qualified third party to confirm or clarify our final evaluation, full disclosure of all financial expenditures, and shared celebration of all God does through our collaboration.



So let's say that your church has had two phases of an initiative, and you are now determining if it is time to officially exit (except from relationships). Or perhaps you have been

in a partnership that has not had a clearly delimited time framework, and you are starting to wonder how/when your church should exit. Here are some suggestions:

Global Initiative Exit Process

1. Take stock of what's been done.

Set aside time with your initiative leaders to review your original goals for this partnership and any adjustments to those goals that partners might have made mid-course. By God's grace, what has been accomplished? What remains to be finished? Who is best equipped to continue to move efforts forward (unless there are clear reasons to think otherwise, it should probably be your national partners)?

2. Ask field partners for their evaluation.

Sit down with your partners to review the initiative's shared goals. Ask them to summarize what they feel has been accomplished and what remains to be finished. Are there any substantial areas where your viewpoint and your partners' perspectives differ? Seek clarity as needed. You may also want to pursue an objective evaluation from respected, on-the-ground leaders who were not a part of your initiative. All partners will benefit from clearly understanding what went well and what could have been done better.



3. Envision what an extension would accomplish.

If you are debating extending the initiative, you will want to carefully define the rationale. For instance, if your church remained in the initiative for another year, are you relatively certain that more goals could be completed? How would your church be involved in a way that clearly moved the initiative toward a conclusion? Think carefully about whether your ongoing involvement might stifle rather than encourage local leadership, ownership, and involvement.

4. Assess alternatives.

If your church concluded its involvement in this initiative now, what people and financial resources would be freed up to use elsewhere? Is there another initiative that could utilize these resources? Describe some of the potential benefits of this shift. Does this seem like better stewardship than continuing in your present initiative? Why?

5. Make sure you have fulfilled your commitments.

Did you promise your partners anything that you have not delivered? Situations may have changed, but make sure that to the best of your ability, your "yes has been yes and your no has been no."

6. Plan the baton pass.

How can your church affirm local leaders who are picking up the responsibility for various efforts you have been engaged in?

"Think carefully about whether your ongoing involvement would stifle local leadership, ownership, and involvement."

7. Help develop local sustainability.

If your church has invested financially in an ongoing project, how can you strengthen local ownership and habits of generosity to successfully transfer this project to local leaders? (This

question should have been part of initial planning, but if it wasn't, you need to wrestle with it now.)

Reaching the point of sustainability may require that your church invest additional monies to successfully transition to local support. Your national partners probably need at least a year's advance warning before you stop giving.

8. Dedicate time for quality dialog.

What discussions with your on-the-ground partners would help to bring your initiative to a positive conclusion? Are there other actions needed to achieve successful closure? Within what timeframe could these be completed? Plan at least one or two visits after your initiative officially ends to address unresolved concerns.

9. Bridge to new partners.

Your role may be ending, but it is possible that other partners with other gifts are needed by this initiative going forward. Are there potential partners you should introduce to the initiative as you conclude your involvement? If so, are there appropriate ways you could facilitate these new relationships?



10. Consider launching a new initiative together.

What if you closed one partnership by inviting your national church partners to join you in an outreach in another location? Is there a people or place God has laid on their hearts? Maybe you should let them take the lead and join as their “junior partner” in that new effort.

11. Affirm ongoing friendships.

What relationships between your church members and your partners will continue? Are there ways that your church can affirm or support these ongoing personal connections for greatest benefit? How can you continue to partner in prayer? If there have been relationships that have been hurt by misunderstandings or differences, are there any ways you should seek to repair the damage as you complete your partnership? Are there failures, either personal or church, that you should confess and ask forgiveness from your partners?

12. Help your congregation grasp the rationale for closure.

Do your church members, especially those most involved in this initiative, understand that exiting well and at the right time is an important aspect of being a good partner? Make a list of key concepts that need to be communicated to various groups about your exiting

process. Commit one-on-one time with those who may be struggling with your decision to end the initiative.

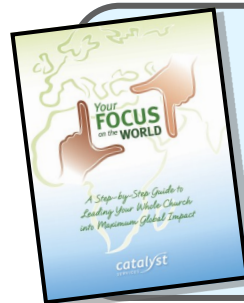
13. Celebrate enthusiastically.

Make plans to celebrate all that God has done through your shared initiative both in your church and with your field partners. Engage everyone in a process of thanking God

for His blessings on your efforts. Make sure you thank your people for their investment of time, abilities, prayers, and finances.

14. Analyze what you have learned.

You want to grow your partnering skills as you conclude your global initiative. What did you learn about working together despite cultural differences? What did you learn from your mistakes? What did you discover about yourselves and your own church? How did you expand your leadership ability? What changes do you need to make to be better partners in future initiatives?



Catalyst's **Your FOCUS on the World** manual has a wealth of information about how to establish and implement a healthy global initiative. Learn more and order your copy from Catalyst Service's [online store](https://www.catalystservices.org/postings/your-focus-on-the-world).



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