

Putting a Church Outreach Plan Together



Planning a Christian outreach event is generally geared toward providing educational and recreation services to the community, helping families survive crises and assisting needy children and elderly.

Outreach events can either be a sole project of a Christian group or church or a partnership or collaboration among various churches, groups, and institutions. Whether planning a one-time or a regular church outreach event, time management and effective communication are key aspects in making the event successful.

Consider taking the following steps to develop a simple church outreach plan:

1. **Read through this document.** There are several good books on outreach and service projects. For example, consider *Servolution* by Dino Rizzo (Leadership Network) or Group's *Body Building Guide to Outreach* (Group Publishing).
2. **Saturate your planning process in prayer.** Seek leading from the Lord God as you make plans to reach out with the gospel. The Bible reminds us: "Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and your plans will succeed." (Proverbs 16:3)
3. **Speak with other churches.** Use their best ideas. Don't simply adopt what others are doing; adapt as necessary. Consider what gaps there are in your community and how you as a church could fill that gap.
4. **Understand your demographic/target family.** Conduct demographic studies (hard and soft data) – find out what needs there are in the community. Understand the demographics of the target community, group or individuals that will benefit from the event. Arrange a meeting with church leaders and members with main agenda of presenting, discussing and developing plans for a community outreach event. Begin to establish standards, expectations, strategies and a time frame for the event(s).

5. **Brainstorm a list of every possible outreach event**, community felt needs class, and service opportunity you can think of. Develop three different lists (events, classes/seminars, service opportunities). Examples include:

- a. **Events** (typically larger and more costly, but reaching far more people – often city wide events, but also includes community specific events). Examples include:
- Carnivals (e.g. moon bounces, kids programming, etc.)
 - Co-sponsor large community events (partnering with local communities and civic organizations)
 - Free community skating party
 - Special Memorial Service
 - Celebrity Golf Tournament
 - Public servant recognition day (for police, fireman, etc)
 - Free movie sponsored by the community
 - Free concerts (series of summer evening concerts)
 - Vacation Bible School (or Backyard Vacation Bible School in numerous homes)
 - Neighborhood cookouts and pool parties
 - Community/neighborhood block parties
 - Family movie nights (free movies with popcorn and drinks)
 - Sporting tournaments (i.e., cricket, tennis, beach volleyball, etc.)
 - Sponsor classic car show
 - Special Christmas Eve service
 - Community New Year’s Eve party
 - Information meetings (free meal and presentation about new church)
 - Parent’s night outs (fun activities for kids at local school while parents go out)

These types of events will typically take more effort, coordination and money than service projects but they will reach more people. In identifying events, consider researching local community/city and neighborhood association plans. Look for ways to partner/participate in events already planned by the community.

- b. **Classes/Seminars** (typically target specific felt needs of the target demographic—can target large or small groups of people). Examples include:

- Parenting seminar
- Newcomers Guide to the Community (practical seminar to get new people in the community familiar with the services and features of the community)
- Marriage workshop
- Estate planning workshop
- Personal finances/budgeting workshop
- Time management workshop
- College Preparation for Parents Seminar (getting ready for the college years)
- Basic computer skills
- Job interview and resume skills
- Basic landscaping seminar

The key to prioritizing classes and seminars are to ask “who will we reach?”, “how big is the felt need (i.e. how many people is this likely to appeal to)?”, “where will the class be held?” and “who will lead it (i.e. get a community leader with credibility – the

local high school principal to lead a parenting seminar)? Get innovative. Use these seminars to network in the community. The best contacts you make may be in finding seminar leaders and facility locations.

- c. **Service Opportunities** (typically smaller scale and low cost – usually target localized groups of people). The Random Acts of Kindness Institute maintains one of the best free lists of community service ideas. Their 18 page list of ideas can be found at http://www.actsofkindness.org/file_uploads/files/11_pdf.pdf. Service opportunities are almost endless and include:

- adopt a highway for cleanup
- volunteer service a local schools
- car wash
- pumping gas and car window washing
- carrying groceries to cars
- Giving away bottled water to commuters
- Giving away stamps at the post office
- Visiting people in nursing homes
- Taking fresh baked goods to local police and fireman
- Handing out snacks or hot chocolate to people standing in line at community events

Service opportunities take very little planning and very little money. Each small group should be challenged to make service opportunities a regular part of their focus. Imagine groups that do a weekly service project.

6. **Prioritize the items** on each of the three lists from highest to lowest priority (e.g. priority #1, #2, #3, etc.) based on consideration for community needs, cost, effort required per person reached, number of people to be reached, and what other community minded organizations are or are not doing. Also, consider the “brand identity” and “niche” that you are trying to establish as a church. If you want to become known as a church that helps single parents or the homeless or community cleanup, etc., bias your outreach that specific direction. Note: remember, every outreach event is an opportunity to market the church to the community.
7. **Schedule events on your calendar.** Assign a committee to delegate tasks. Check on possible partners and resources for the event and consider taking a survey from church members to have a better perspective of the interest, preferences, and commitment of the church members and the community. Set an initial schedule on the church calendar and make a timetable for the event. Do this as early as possible to give time for planning. Challenge people to take ownership for the events. For each event, identify specific marketing opportunities.
8. **Research the event's costs** and possible funding resources. Identify all equipment needs--from audio-visual systems to documentation and implementation of any tasks the event needs--then develop the event budget. For example, will a church band be needed? When? Will sound equipment be needed? Will a DJ be hired? Will music CDs be played? Identify any special equipment needs. Examples include popcorn machines, snow cone machines, cotton candy machines, sports equipment, kid’s games, etc. Determine whether to rent or

buy equipment. In some cases, it will make sense to purchase equipment rather than rent based on the number of planned usages.

9. **Identify special needs for serving food.** In many areas, special permits are needed to serve hot food. Based on planned events, determine any special permitting requirements.
10. **Conduct regular meetings** to set and implement goals and tasks of the various planning stages. Iron out any issue that comes along the way.
11. **Inform the public about the outreach event** through various media venues including printing and distribution of marketing collaterals, adding information about the event at the church website, sending postcards to community partners and making announcement at social network sites.
12. **Write out an outreach plan** that includes (most items are taken from the work above):
 - a. Identify the purpose and goals of your outreach plan
 - b. Identify the standard/expectations for the number of events to be held
 - c. Identify list of top priorities for the three types of outreach (events, seminars, service)
 - d. Identify schedule of events
 - e. Identify organizational structure for coordinating events
 - f. Identify special needs (music, equipment, food, etc.)
 - g. Identify budget for events

References:

www.ehow.com

www.churchplanting4me.com