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A GUIDE TO MAINTAINING
MISSIONS ENGAGEMENT WHEN YOUR
SHORT-TERM TRIP IS CANCELLED

DELAYED

COVID-19 Cancelled Our Short Term Trip... Now What?!



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Fellow Short Term Trip Leaders:

We are certainly in unique times as the world wrestles with the impact and changes COVID-19 has brought on all of our lives... not to mention our churches and organizations who have made significant changes in short term trip strategies and plans as we all await the next days' news around this pandemic. For many of us, we're finding ourselves with no option but to cancel or reschedule our short term trips and manage all of the logistics around those changes. And while we all know what it's like to cancel a short term trip from time to time, this is a unique situation clearing out wide swaths of our schedule for an unknown amount of time.

This is why our team wanted to create this resource as a guide to help you navigate the turbulence of these shifting times. We understand that **you want to create an excellent experience for your participants, and serve the community you committed to, no matter the circumstances.** And here we are with some crazy circumstances! The great thing is we believe in a Sovereign God and trust all of this has a purpose. Our responsibility remains to carefully guide our constituents to a greater engagement in a missional life.

Here are a few things you will find in this e-book:

- Checklists to help make sure you're not forgetting anything
- Communication plans for reaching out to your participants
- Tips of managing finances for a rescheduled trip
- Ideas for challenging your participants to stay engaged
- Thoughts on how to care for the heart and spirit of your participants

We certainly hope this resource helps you build a better plan of engagement during this season where you actually **increase your engagement and impact.**

Blessings on this road ahead!

Soli Deo Gloria!

ServiceReef Leadership Team



Will Rogers



Micah Pritchard



Drew Davis

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How to Handle Fear & News in Light of a Pandemic?

Depending on which news source and which day, it may appear as if the world is ending. Amidst this crisis (or the next one), how do we respond internally to what is going on around us?

What should be our response as those who follow Christ?

Although there is plenty of guidance out there on the handling of this pandemic, one area we wanted to walk through is what is this doing to our soul, how should we respond both internally and externally, and what role Jesus might be asking us to take. A verse that has been helpful to me during this time is Isaiah 41:13, "I am the Lord your God, who takes you by the right hand and says to you, 'Do not fear, I will help you'".

Everyone who has a relationship with Christ Jesus has a direct line to wisdom, strength, courage, and hope regardless of the situation we find ourselves in. We have put a few of our thoughts together below, but please know that if you go to Him, there is wisdom and direction for the days and weeks ahead specific to your situation (James 1:5).

First, spend some time in listening prayer

Take a few moments each day in the quiet of your house or car to create opportunities to give your soul some rest. If you are like most of us, you go from moment to moment with hardly even 15 minutes for lunch. The isolation required of today allows us to take a moment to pause... take advantage of it! Give yourself some room to pause, pray, and listen each day (even if it is just one minute in your car before you go into work or enter your home... just take some deep breaths and allow a quiet moment to align yourself to God). Ask for wisdom, understanding, and peace that surpasses understanding.

Second, release this to God

There is a phrase popularized by John Eldredge lately where he simply prays, "Jesus, I give everyone and everything to you". Repeat that a few times when you are feeling stressed or anxious. Practice benevolent detachment by releasing patients, tragedy, or strong emotions to Him. Consider Matthew 11:30 and ask how Jesus might lighten your burden during these stressful times.

Third, consider your response

We are called to be light and salt to this world. There are neighbors, friends, family, co-workers, and community members who are completely freaked out and afraid during this time. Additionally, the necessary action of socially distancing ourselves will add to the fear, despair, and loneliness of those around us. Find practical ways to love and be light during this dark time. Consider even small actions, like texting neighbors, making a meal/cookies for them, or just letting them know that you are thinking

of them. Check in on neighbors, especially those that might be isolated. If you feel like taking additional steps, consider inviting them to dinner, board games, iced tea on the porch, etc. Even if you want to sit 6 feet apart on your back deck to minimize contact, any socialization will feel like light in this dark time. Be smart about your actions, but also recognize that this is an ideal time for Christ followers to help lighten others burdens, ease their fear, and help share the hope that we have... and last we checked, viruses don't spread via phone calls or text messages, so even small steps can be meaningful. :-)

Wherever your heart may be these days, remember that we have someone who created us and formed us before we had taken our first breath. Perhaps, like the tribe of Issachar (I Chronicles 12:32), we can be a people who understand the time and can see the path ahead. Or perhaps like Esther, we can consider where we have been put into our jobs, neighborhood, church, community, and family for "just a time as this" (Esther 4:14).

Most of all, during this time of isolation, know that you are never alone. Although the road before us is difficult, there is someone we can rely on for strength and understanding. Remember the promises of God, and, as appropriate, share that hope with others.

Deuteronomy 31:6 "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:13). Blessings on you as we journey together and lead others toward health in the weeks and months ahead.

Your Role as a Leader in Short Term Missions

No matter what your official title might be for your role in missions, you are a leader... now more than ever. It's important to remember that people are desperately looking for direction in a time like this and amazingly, they will likely do what you suggest. Perhaps another way to think of yourself is a guide... someone who is walking a few steps ahead of others, someone who has a plan, and someone who knows the path. And here's the great thing - you only need to know the path a little better than everyone else to help guide them well.

LEADING WELL

So this begs the question, how do you lead well? There are many attributes of leadership that we could discuss here but let's focus on a few that intersect the most with the current circumstances.

- **Transparency** - don't hold the cards of information close to yourself (either from participants or other team members). **Share what you know and share it openly and quickly.** Far too often people hold onto information as some form of capital. Leaders share information quickly so those who are following have the tools to make the best decisions on their own. Be transparent about what you know, what you're hearing from partners, your concerns, alternate plans for the future, etc. It's really a matter of honoring other people well when you are transparent.
- **Communicate** - we all know this but if you think you are over communicating then you're closer to where you should be. You might want to consider building a weekly communication plan as a means to touch base with everyone about the current status, how things are looking for future plans, what your partner groups are doing, how they can stay engaged, and anything else that could help them. **It's always better to communicate out to your constituents before they are requesting information from you.**
- **Engage** - everyone is feeling like a caged animal right now. Remember that your offering of short term trips has a goal for people to use their skills for something bigger. You don't offer short term trips so people can see the world - you offer them to make a difference. In a similar light, **you can be engaging and encouraging people to make a difference right here and right now.** Check out some of the suggestions later in this resource.

These are simply a few suggestions. Just remember that **you are a leader and people are looking to you to lead them and to guide them.** People want to be led, especially by people they know and trust. And even as these are uncertain times for all of us, you still have an incredibly unique opportunity to lead others well.

Caring for the Heart of Participants

For many going on a mission trip is a monumental step. I went on my first trip my freshman year of high school and it changed the trajectory of my life. Maybe they come from a family of missionaries, or a friend/mentor has gone on one and they want to go on one as well. Maybe they are simply following the way of Jesus and going. Regardless of the reason, mission trips can hold a lot of emotion with them whether expressed or not. For this reason, it is imperative that we do everything we can as not just leaders, but as guides to walk with those entrusted to us through the ups and downs of a cancelled trip. Specifically, in light of current events there are even more questions and fears that come up with mission trips. Many participants may be thinking, will i ever get to go again. There is so much planning for those outside of vocational ministry that goes into actually going on a short-term trip. From babysitters, to boarding pets, personal time off at work, school schedules, sport schedules, maybe even family holidays. For many, the stars have to align just to be able to follow what they believe God is calling them too. It is so important to keep this in mind when communicating the cancellation of a trip and subsequently walking with those through this because with the cancelling comes almost a gut punch after so much prep work. Caring for their heart in the midst of this is crucial.

People are looking to you for answers and the first way I would say you would care for their heart: **care for your own**. I know I know, we all know this, but seriously, are you? If not that's ok and you're probably not alone, but go ahead and start somewhere, anywhere. If you are not taking time to pray and be in God's word before you start your day or even making each phone call may I just encourage you, start, now. We all know that the bible is not going to give you a necessarily clean-cut answer for questions concerning travel or refunds, but is that what all of this is about? In the midst of the chaos it can be hard to find a time to do things that bring you joy. Can I encourage you real quick? Fight for space to breathe, to take joy in God's creation. Go to that place you like to eat at for lunch. Take a walk through the park. Call the friend you've been meaning to call. If we cannot stop and realize that this too shall pass, then we will only grow short and impatient with those we serve.

As you have cared for your own heart, you can now welcome the ability and space to care for your leaders and participants. The most important piece in this: **listen**. Right, of course, we all listen, but are we really listening? Are we hearing their heart? The frustration, panic, worry, disappointment. The plans that have to be cancelled, the work they will have to go through to change all those plans. Let's be honest, we all just want to be heard. So be patient, listen to the questions and hear the heart of your people.

So we have cared for our hearts, listened to the heart of those we are entrusted with, now what? Encourage. Specifically, in light of the pandemic today. Look at Colossians 1:16-17, *"For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together."* The phrase that has been on my mind and I have shared with a few people, there is great peace in knowing Jesus. Encourage your team and remind them who is in control and that none of this surprises him.

To Cancel or Reschedule a Short Term Trip?

For most of us, the decision to cancel or reschedule a short term trip was made for us with the cancellation of international flights and other quarantines. That still left the remaining question of having to simply cancel the trip all together or reschedule it for a later date. Both have their reasons and both have their benefits. Let's unpack the two side by side to better assess which might be best for your organization.

To Cancel?	To Reschedule?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• When it's time specific• When the team you're visiting isn't on the field any longer• When there are fixed variables• Project was time sensitive	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Because of government travel restrictions• Because it's the wise thing to do• When you have a flexible team, team leaders, field host, and logistics

Questions you could/should be asking:

Is it possible to reschedule?

Do you want to reschedule the trip?

Would participants be able to reschedule?

Can we accomplish the same goal if we reschedule?

How much work will it be to reschedule the trip (and is it worth it)?

What are our absolutes for rescheduling?

Checklist for Cancelling OR Rescheduling a Trip

Use this checklist to help you map out the logistics you have for cancelling or rescheduling a trip. Blanks are left at the bottom for you to fill in your own tasks.

Completed?	Task Item	Category	Owner	Notes
YES	SAMPLE: Starbucks for Admins	Appreciation	Drew	Bought gift cards
	Flights	Logistics		
	Hotel/Logding	Logistics		
	Field Transportation	Logistics		
	Insurance	Logistics		
	Build Financial Plan	Financial		
	Transferring Funds	Financial		
	Reallocating Funds	Financial		
	Participant Plan	Communications		
	Team Leader Plan	Communications		
	Partner Plan	Communications		
	Donor Plan	Communications		
	Team Video Meetings	Communications		
	Assign Interim Duties	Team Leaders		
	Weekly Digest for Participants	Participants		
	Participant Assignments	Participants		
	Participant Stories	Participants		
	Build Missional.Life Profile	Participants		

Best practices to improve clarity on fundraising

One of the key elements that will drive questions from participants, leaders, and parents is “what happens to the funds that I have raised for this trip?”

Some key elements to prepare yourself and your teams for this include the following, which may include things you are already doing, but perhaps can do better/different to make this easier each time that you go through this process.

Involve your Accounting Team and Financial Leaders

This one is pretty obvious, but there are some critical questions that they will need to help walk you through, including:

- ✓ Tax implications and verbiage you can use when people ask for a refund (because they will, even if you’ve told them many times what the process is)
- ✓ What should we do with the funds that were already provided?
- ✓ Are there any restrictions and/or considerations we should make when deciding to cancel or postpone a trip?
- ✓ Identify which funds or trips that already have expenses and determine what do to in order to recover or eat that cost (e.g. travel costs, etc.)

Involve your Leadership Team

Depending on the involvement of your leaders, some may already be well aware of what is going on, but here are some thoughts to consider:

- ✓ Be prepared to summarize for them (or provide them a summary that they can provide their own leadership/board).
- ✓ Provide options with benefits/drawbacks to each approach. For example, reschedule versus cancel.
- ✓ If you decide to reschedule, have a general timeframe for communication... or at least determine what information you will need to decide on a timeframe.
- ✓ If not involved in the financial communication with your accounting team, provide your leaders a roadmap/summary of the financial impact and approach that is suggested (as they will likely be asked this by their leadership)

Communicate Clearly to Participants and Leaders

- ✓ Create a communication plan, even if a very simple one. For example, write up a communication to the teams and create some common questions people will ask.
- ✓ Clearly communicate what will happen with any funds that have been raised (based on your conversations with accounting and leadership).
- ✓ Have others review your communication. This can be a review for typos, tone, etc., but it is important to make sure that you get buy in from others.
- ✓ Copy and Paste... once you answer a question once, either copy it to a word doc so you can use it later or add it to your common FAQ area/web page.
- ✓ Provide some education or guidance to the process. For example, participants are not aware of the tax situation for non-profit donation. Provide some simple guidance that helps them understand enough, while keeping communication focused.
- ✓ Provide assurance that their concerns are addressed. While you may have gone through this process many times, this might be the participant's first time a trip was cancelled. Try to put yourself in their shoes and address uncertainty. Assure them that you have done this before and will guide them through the process.

Communicating Well

1. Over Communication

I truly believe that over-communicating is key. Would you rather someone say, “Why didn’t you tell me?”, or “Ok, I have enough information?”. I for one will take the latter. Granted there are certain situations where information must come out at its rightful time and place, but communicate until you are blue in the face and people are asking you to stop telling them.

2. Break your Communication List Down

Who needs to know what? Staff, team leaders, participants, parents, leaders, donors, partners, lodging, transportation. Take a moment a create a list of who exactly needs to know what.

3. Communication is Two Way

Give people space to ask questions. Whether that is through social media, responding to email or just making phone calls, allow space for people to ask.

4. Behind the Scenes

Don’t be afraid to give them insight behind the curtain. I have found a lot of questions come from a lack of context or communication. What will hurt from letting them know your process? I mean really are any of us keeping presidential size secrets that people cannot know? Take a breath and give the people what they want!

5. Prioritize your Communication List

There is nothing worse than a participant knowing something before a team leader. Enough said.

6. Create a Sample Email (then test it)

Write out your email. Give it a proofread. Now read it again. Now send it to your team to proofread. Now send it to yourself. Ok you’re all set! Hit send and let the questions roll in, just kidding, you’ve communicated so well nobody will have any questions.

7. Donors

This is a very important group. A couple approaches to this and it all depends on how your organization handles donations and participants. First of all, thank them, so important but can be forgotten in the chaos. Second, let them know your policy for donations whether the money will remain with the participant until they can go, or your own policy regarding funds when a trip is cancelled. This might include letting them know the IRS policy on donations and refunds.

8. What's next?!

Let them know how you will be monitoring the situation who you are listening to and how you are going to communicate moving forward. Should they be looking for emails, phone calls, updates from team leaders, social, website? Be clear and follow through on those. If it changes, let them know!

9. Empower

If you have the space, empower your team leaders to communicate to your team. For one, it takes the burden off of you to communicate and manage however many people you have going on trips. Second, as leaders we should desire to draw out of our people the ability to lead. Giving this opportunity although small gives them the chance to grow and lead their team well, at your direction. You could even write them a sample email to get their brain working.

10. Have Fun with It!

Seriously, I'm not kidding. Especially at a time like this, there is so much somberness going around that being able to lighten the mood through an email, will relieve the tension for the participant and leader. We have to have some perspective that the God of the universe is in control.

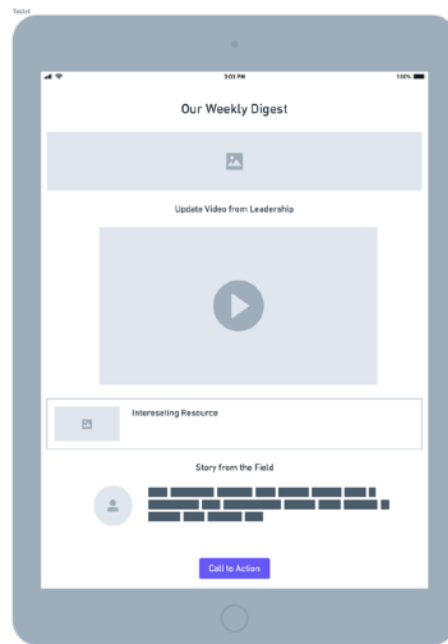
In the meantime...

Share some good books to read (could I recommend "The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry"), encourage them to engage with the community they were going to be apart over there right here, meetings over zoom or Skype, love people by respecting their space especially at this time, or make a list of places where people in vulnerable situations might be that they could serve and love well. I was telling a friend of mine after all this is over if I am no closer to the Father than I was when it started I will be disappointed. Encourage time and space to spend with God.

Building a Weekly Updated Digest

Consider creating a weekly digest (or whatever frequency you prefer) to stay engaged with your trip participants while we all wait to learn next steps and what's coming. Everyone understands the unknown of the current situation. We believe this is a great time for you to stay engaged regularly with your participants and continue to keep their hearts and minds engaged in a missional perspective of life.

NOTE: There's no ideal time line for a resource like this... keep evaluating each week if still needed.



Here are a few suggestions for what you might include in a weekly digest.:

- ✓ Prayer requests - share prayer requests from your church, organization, partners, or other things.
- ✓ Scripture verses - teach and edify your participants so they can continue to grow in their faith.
- ✓ Key updates - keep everyone updated on anything new from you or the field. People want to know!
- ✓ Stories - share stories from the partner on the field or other things you're hearing and learning. We're all in this together.
- ✓ One thing you could do - give suggestions for one key thing each time that they can do.
- ✓ Survey question - get to know your constituents better, send out a survey each time to learn about their missional interests, challenges, or desires.
- ✓ Note from you - make it personal and share from your heart how things are going.
- ✓ Sermon resource - share any sermons or lessons from your pastor or other churches (make sure to give credit!)
- ✓ Blog article - write or share a blog article about how others are working through this interesting time.

Repurposing a Short Term Trip to Local Engagement

Cancelling or rescheduling a short term trip may not be the only option. It's worth considering if there are other options like repurposing the trip into something local - regardless if you also cancel or reschedule the trip. This all comes down to the original purpose of the trip and working to extrapolate from that trip its purpose.

Let's take for example a Youth Trip / Vacation Bible School (VBS) trip in Poland. The heart behind the trip is to engage high school students in a VBS program and have them engage well with younger kids and help make the program a success. Now let's see where we might be able to take that same group of high school students and engage them now or in months to come in a similar purpose.

- You could have those high school students working to creatively build things for local kids to do while they are in a quarantine.
- You could have those high school students reaching out to family with young kids to see if they have any needs during this time.
- You could have those high school students sign up for a local VBS-type program this summer
- You could have those high school students reach out to local teachers to ask what they are doing to help parents and see if they could help.

It's really quite simple if you stop to think back about the original purpose and goal for the trip and then mine out a means to do that locally. Truth is, many people are quite bored and your creative ideas here could both help engage your participants and help a lot of people in your local community.

Ways to Engage Participants During Quarantine

Who ever wants to be quarantined?! Maybe a few people out there but it's not likely. Thankfully there are tons of creative things you can do (and should do) to engage your participants even now as people are home. Don't miss this opportunity to guide your people into a greater missional journey.

- **Prayer** - create a prayer guide around missions (partners, projects, people, regions, needs) to send out to your participants to be praying each day for something missional.
- **Learn** - encourage them to keep learning in their missional journey either through a missions book or programs like Perspectives on the World Gospel Movement.
- **Books** - send out books about missions that people could read - biographies of missionaries, missions philosophy, stories, etc.
- **Support Local Healthcare Workers** - remember the work that local healthcare professionals are doing to combat the COVID-19 virus and reach out to provide a meal or help them in some way.
- **Elderly in Area** - reach out to local nursing homes or other facilities to see if could use assistance with supplies, errands, or other needs.
- **Encouragement** - write encouragement notes to missionaries, partners, donors, or others who are part of your missional community.
- **Assessments** - encourage your participants to take an online assessment (Enneagram, Meyers-Briggs, Strengths, etc.) to learn more about themselves and how their unique design could be used for missional purposes.
- **Donate to a Cause** - there are tons of causes out there now helping people in need around the current virus or financial circumstance, donate to one of those causes.
- **Missional.Life** - create a [Missional.Life](#) account to learn more about who God has made you to be, what story He has written, and where He might be calling you.
- **Research** - learn more about the specific field you were planning to visit to learn more about their culture, the religious makeup, their history, and their needs.
- **Zoom Meetings** - host a team Zoom meeting to keep everyone connected and engaged. Zoom meetings can be great to keep everyone's mind in the game.
- **Share Stories** - have everyone share stories (online if possible) about what they are learning through this season about their short term trip hopes.

5 Ways to Stay on Mission at Home

For many, the mission trip begins well before they even touch down on a foreign land. It starts in their city maybe even in their neighborhood. With so many trips being shut down right now and living in uncertainty, I want to provide 5 ways we can encourage our trip leaders and their teams to engage the world right around them. After all, that's what Jesus did.

1. Take your neighbor or those in vulnerable situations a meal

There is a phrase that begins with "You never really know someone until...", the facetious side of me wants to say "until you know them" but one way we often see Jesus getting to know people involves a meal or inviting them into a meal. So take your team or encourage your team to share a meal with someone they may not know.

2. Spend time online with people from the community

Know a local church that focuses on that demographic, check out their website and see what they are doing to carry on through the quarantine. Maybe watch their live service, and see who can learn more words or pick up phrases and then debrief with your team. Remember things may be different, but they aren't weird.

3. Go to a restaurant that serves food from the place you would have visited

Two years ago I was sitting in the Louisville airport when a conversation began between myself and an older woman from Ethiopia, we began sharing stories of traveling and different cultures. She encouraged me to visit an Ethiopian café and share in a coffee ceremony. Most people think the way I make my coffee is ceremonial in and of itself (Chemex pour over anyone?!).

4. Read a book or watch a movie.

I have found books to be more accurate than movies, but unless this quarantine plans on lasting a couple months I better just watch a movie. If you love books and reading grab a book from that country or city and learn everything you can about it, study it, research it, and get together with your team over Skype or Zoom and share what you learned. God has created some amazing cultures that reflect the uniqueness and beauty of who he is so go learn about them.

PS. GeographyNow is a must on YouTube, you can thank me later.

5. Serve

When in doubt, don't over complicate it. God has you right where he has you. Live out the confidence and hope we have in Christ by serving those around you. Write a card to all of your neighbors, call your grandparents or the nursing home to check in on them. Thank the superstore workers when you can only get one roll of paper towels, if you know you know. Deliver food to families who might be affected by the loss of a job. When in doubt, do something, anything, don't overcomplicate it. You are an image bearer of the father, live out of your identity in Him and walk confidently and wisely into serving those around you.

Key Resources for COVID-19

While there are numerous resources available today for the COVID-19 pandemic, we have found the following resources the most helpful for relevant information.



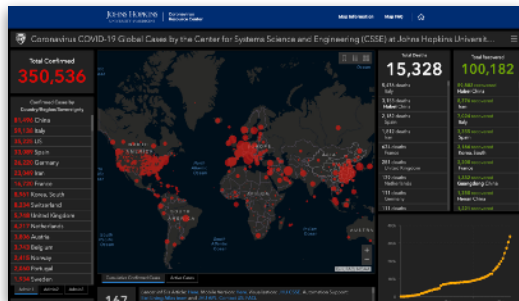
World Health Organization Website

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>



World Health Organization Website

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>



Johns Hopkins World COVID-19 Map

<https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>



“A Christian Healthcare Worker’s Response to COVID-19” ebook

Free ebook from [MedicalMissions.com](https://www.MedicalMissions.com)

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