

MissionNext Consultation Summary **April 3-4, 2006, Dallas, TX**

Introduction

This is a report on a consultation with a focus on increasing the flow of post-college adults in their 20's and 30's entering the American missions enterprise. This session was called by Finishers Project, a missions mobilization effort with a focus on boomers – those roughly in their 40's and 50's who are now beginning to turn 60. The thought is to not simply impose the boomer initiative on the younger generation, but to rethink the template for younger adults.

From this two-day session a clear vision and action plan was formulated. Initiatives are ongoing with stakeholders on five fronts – the web, churches, agencies, marketing and training.

This is a summary of highly interactive thinking of 35 people from 22 organizations, so it is impossible to give individual attribution to the ideas, except to the Lord.

Vision

To see a bold increase in cross-cultural mission workers among those 23–40 years old (GenX) in North America in a customer-centric mobilization initiative that includes components of:

Matching self-discovery with opportunities and options for service (via the web, in conferences or in other relationships established)

Serving Jesus and others, (as opposed to organizations)

Meeting them at their point of perceived need for ...

- Flexibility
- Relationship
- Mentoring
- Sense of community

... at their current level of willingness to make a commitment.

Values

The Core Values, then, are to establish a place for the target audience to experience flexibility, relationship, mentoring, sense of community, self-discovery, clear opportunities and options for matching. This can be done within the boundaries of encouraging one another to love and good deeds. The work of sending laborers is ultimately a work in the heart and mind by the Holy Spirit.

Another core value of MissionNext is to accomplish the stated vision and goals for placing laborers for His harvest through strategic, effective partnerships.

Executive Summary

Mobilization Defined:

In order to begin, it was necessary to define an overarching view of what mobilization is and the scope or boundaries of the “Problem”

Mobilization, in the context of a stand-alone process or ministry, encompasses these key elements:

- Inform
- Motivate
- Equip
- Connect
- Deploy (agency’s work)

Different organizations and events focus on one or more of these elements. In order for the vision of a bold increase to be accomplished, each element and the coordination must be done well for the process to work effectively.

For a mobilization initiative to be neutral, it cannot be in the sending or deploying business. The MissionNext initiative will focus on and actively seek partnerships with other organizations that inform, motivate, equip and connect, and that seek to serve individuals, churches, and agencies.

Scope of the Task:

What is the scope of the target audience?

- For those born between 1965 and 1985 (21–40), called GenXers
- For North Americans (Canada, USA).
- For evangelicals.
- For English Speakers, including second-generation ethnic minorities
- For techno-centric people, since it is anticipated that there will be a strong electronic component to whatever is done.

This generation is characterized by

- Coming from more broken marriages.
- Less loyalty to jobs.
- Higher risk tolerance.
- Post-Modern (non rational – not linear, image driven, more relational, non-formal, reluctance to grow up.)

What is the scope of the infrastructure MissionNext will serve?

- To serve churches and mission agencies in America in order to provide laborers for His harvest to American mission agencies.

While those outside the immediate scope may be served by the MissionNext initiative, the marketing and delivery focus will be to those that fall within the defined scope.

Action Plan Summary

The following five areas have task groups assigned. (What was the timing agreed to?)

Web – Re-design the web site (agencies to provide people in the GenX group in order to bring together a community to design the web site). Peter Armstrong, Mission Data International, will lead the way along with Rod McLeish and Jim Harper of Crown Builders

Churches - Work with churches to help develop missional attitudes in churches. Develop curriculum material for small group study. The Mission Society and, perhaps, ACMC, Caleb Project, DualReach, and Global Focus to undertake this task.

Agency – Consult agencies to find ways to help them deal with GenXers. Some of this may involve helping agencies to assist their mobilizers and candidate committees by providing better training. Chuck Micheals, Wycliffe Bible Translators, will lead the process along with SIM, Finishers Project, and possibly some other agencies.

Marketing campaign. - Nick Noll will provide leadership in this area; Peter Armstrong, Mission Data International, will assist along with New Tribes Mission and Crown Builders.

Training – Rick Higgins, Columbia Bible College, will help in developing this portion of the overall initiative and include non-formal mission training as a component.

Endnote:

This MissionNext Consultation was held at the International Wycliffe headquarters, Dallas, Texas on April 3-4, 2006. There were 35 participants from 22 organizations.

The consultation was initiated and facilitated by the Finishers Project. For the last 10 years Finishers has been mobilizing boomers (in their 40's and 50's, early 60's). However, in the last several years they have seen increasing interest from young adults interested in missions. The goal is not simply to replicate what Finishers has done, but to create a custom approach to mobilization for the next generation.

The format was in the form of round-table discussions facilitated by Don Parrott and Nelson Malwitz. Discussion items on the agenda included defining the target audience, clarifying the purpose, best practices in recruiting young adults, subsequent action steps, assignments and commitments.

Appreciation

The Finishers Project is grateful to those who assembled from far and wide to wrestle with these vital issues. Profound appreciation is due to Wycliffe for virtually donating their facilities for this consultation. Of course, appreciation is due to the Lord, for whom we earnestly seek to serve in this initiative. The climate was decidedly kingdom-minded.

Web Task Group Suggestions/Charter

Summary of the task:

Re-design the web site (agencies to provide GenXers for a focus group to design the web site). Peter Armstrong, Mission Data International, will lead the way along with Rod McLeish and Jim Harper of Crown Builders.

Set strategic objectives in advance of a web specification. These will include the high values of flexibility, relationship, mentoring, a sense of community, self-discovery, opportunities, options and matching.

Flexibility might be achieved by having multiple entry points and non-linear paths, minimizing confusion. Models that the generation is familiar with are to be studied and included in the design of functionality. These may include web sites such as google.com, monster.com, myspace.com, and facebook.com. Other models that should be considered include shorttermmission.com, churchstaffing.com, volunteermatch.org, strengthfinder.com, stocktrade.com as well as finishers.org.

Ideally, the web site will have a minimalist but appropriate look for those in their 20's and 30's.

A relational component will be built in to allow agencies, churches and mentors to interact with those that opt in.

Connecting ware will build on the finishers.org experience especially for mission agencies. This will include notification of mission events or mission agency activity within driving distance of the individual.

The process will include interactive portions to take someone through the application stage.

Web delivery will include parsing by age. Someone at 24 is in a different life stage than someone at 34, for example. Treat subjects such as education, economics (especially debt), the adventure quotient, life silos such as work and family, and God's calling.

Include feature to upload resume

Increase matching criteria to include doctrinal beliefs, ministry philosophy, values, personality

Post positions more frequently and send out emails regularly with new postings.

Increase presence of MissionNext and Finishers in search engines.

NEXT ACTION STEP:

This task group had a conference call and is drafting documents on a working relationship among MDAT, MissionNext and others.

Churches Task Group Suggestions/Charter

Summary of the task:

To work with churches to help develop missional attitudes. Develop curriculum material for small group study. The Mission Society and other groups such as APMC, Caleb Project, DualReach, and Global Focus, to focus on this area.

It is universally agreed that this initiative must include churches as a key component – a feeder system for the bold increase in kingdom workers.

Some elements of a church initiative:

- Work with credibility structures such as denomination headquarters or state conventions.
- Challenge churches to embrace the vision of providing laborers, perhaps, with a key spokesperson.
- Be a thought leader and provide practical resources to churches so they can challenge and equip people to move from a maintenance lifestyle to a missional lifestyle.

This may include:

- Articulating the responsibility before the Lord to be involved in all parts of the mobilization process to inform, motivate, equip, connect and deploy.
- Making a missional mindset a compelling core value to churches.
- Making rough paths plain to becoming missional in word and deed.
- Involving youth pastors to provide engaging tools to reach HS and college age youths. The thought is that this will develop a feeder system for the MissionNext age bracket in the next decade.
- Treat churches as individuals with a high-touch initiative
- Address all ages

Churches are generally negative about sending people to traditional mission agencies. Mount an image campaign to reverse this perception. This may include elements to inform churches about the complex issues that agencies navigate in pursuit of discipling a nation – their effectiveness, their willingness to partner with and serve the church in its missional thinking.

Engage pastors by having an interesting, compelling interactive survey/section
Inform pastors of Finishers/MissionNext websites so they can direct inquirers there.
Develop local church event/curriculum to motivate, train/equip and send.
Develop “Miscopleshship” curriculum to help churches make disciples with a global focus.

NEXT ACTION STEP:

A meeting is planned for Tuesday, May 23, 2006, at The Mission Society headquarters in Atlanta, GA with AIMS, APMC, MissionNext and Finishers Project participating.

Agency Task Group Suggestions/Charter

Summary of the task:

To consult agencies in order to find ways to help them deal with GenXers. Some of this may involve helping agencies to better train their Mobilizers and candidate committees. Chuck Micheals, Wycliffe Bible Translators, will lead the process along with SIM and Finishers and possibly, other agencies.

There is a general consensus that the GenX age group is under-represented in mission agencies. Agencies have not made an intentional adaptation to engage this age group with their key values of self-discovery, flexibility, relationship, mentoring, sense of community, opportunities, options and finding a fit.

The underlying question is, "Will a mission agency attempt to fit a GenXer into its style or adjust its culture to fit GenXers?"

This culture change might be to accept – even embrace – short-term assignments as a mission strategy for accomplishing a goal or recruiting for the longer haul. Use the short-term to intentionally demonstrate flexibility, relationship, mentoring, community, and other core values of this generation. Agencies spurning someone who is willing to offer three years or consecutive summers will be viewed as inflexible and not customer-centric.

Define long term as 2-3 years, and longer than that as career missions.

Assist in mentoring through personal issues such as a broken family or school debt.

Some agencies are successful in attracting GenXers. Launch a secondary initiative to develop a platform to share recruiting experiences and best practices. Include in this initiative informed GenXers to act as a focus group.

Provide tools/consulting to increase the effectiveness of candidate departments to handle influx of applicants. Recruiting and intake must be full-time positions, not an add-on for an already overtaxed individual.

Compile information packet regarding aspects of reaching GenXers to help agencies in areas such as communication tools, brochures, form letters, ways to discuss by phone and email, websites, inter-agency education to bring best-practices all together in one place and bring an appearance of a united front for recruiting.

Urge and resource agencies to offer mentoring to build community, leadership development taking into account and respecting their strengths and experience to make them feel welcome.

Assemble best strategies for tackling the debt issue.

Develop a regional mobilizer network that allows introduction to mentoring opportunities.

(People will let people speak into their lives if there is a relationship of trust. It starts with an introduction.) This network should be domain specific, for example, nurses to speak to nurses.

NEXT ACTION STEP: A follow-up consultation is scheduled for Sept 19-21, 2006, at the SIM headquarters in Charlotte, NC.

Marketing Campaign Task Group Suggestions/Charter

Summary of the task:

Nick Noll will provide leadership in this marketing campaign. Peter Armstrong, Mission Data International, will assist in this effort along with New Tribes Mission. They may also recruit others.

Sponsor market research to churches and individuals.

Participate in pastors' conferences and events attracting lay leaders and, separately, youth leaders.

Churches are generally negative about sending people to traditional mission agencies. Mount an image campaign to reverse this perception. This may include elements to inform churches about the complex issues that agencies navigate in pursuit of discipling a nation – their effectiveness, and their willingness to partner with and serve the church in its missional thinking.

Include a “viral marketing” strategy – a low-cost, high-impact strategy to build awareness of MissionNext. Develop a memorable message to facilitate word-of-mouth transmission of the MissionNext movement.

Perhaps lead with the idea that MN is the place for self-discovery, rather than a portal to missions.

Skywriting or banners over beaches during spring break.
Bumper stickers that drive to the web, such as the current one, “Jesus is coming. Look busy”
Have a highly-recognized spokesperson advocate MissionNext.
Partner with existing groups who are focused on the GenX age group.
Create a focus group of 25-40 year olds that are in missions to determine what moved them to join and how to best recruit their generation.

NEXT ACTION STEP:

Nick Noll is taking the lead, but further action is deferred until the other task groups have defined the movement more clearly.

Training Task Group Suggestions/Charter

Summary of the task:

Rick Higgins, Columbia Bible College, will help in developing this portion of the overall initiative and include non-formal mission training as a component.

Develop a partnership of training institutions to provide deliverables, taking into account the high values of the MissionNext movement, such as self-discovery, gifting, calling, personality, and preferences assessments. The goal is to bring an engaged person to the point where they develop a philosophy-of-mission statement, a ministry assessment profile, and a spiritual formation plan, for example.

The preferences assessments are generally culturally bound, and therefore, will require involvement of Christian sociologists to develop instruments and a delivery method for such assessments to help in discovering purpose in serving.

To have an effective initiative, consensus was built that this partnership of training institutions will likely develop a highly relational approach. This is to allow those searching a platform to tell their story, to mentor or be mentored, to build relationship, to build a sense of community – all with the goal to coach people to take a next step.

Ideally this task group will develop a community of life coaches for this first-half (and the second-half) generations, perhaps issuing a certificate of completion or certificate of courage.

<p>Provide self-assessment tools and alignment of gifts and strengths to ministry options. Develop foundational knowledge, attitudes and skills for ministry.</p>

NEXT ACTION STEP:

The training task group met and defined their charter as follows:

The training subgroup will emphasize preparing men and women in formal and non-formal training at the entry level to the basic mission agency qualifications. The preparation will focus on general training whereas the mission agencies will focus on specialized training.

The timing of the next meeting and members to participate in the task group need to be determined.