

Why join a mission agency? How to choose the right one?

If considering cross-cultural ministry, you may be wondering why anyone would bother joining a mission agency. Surely it would be easier to skip the tricky task of applying to an agency and go it alone? Although it can be hard to choose between them, mission agencies can offer a lot to someone considering mission.

Here are some reasons why joining an agency is a good idea and some criteria that might be helpful in choosing the right one.

Five ways you can benefit from a mission agency

1. Pre-field preparation

Firstly, a good mission agency will provide mentoring and training before you go to your mission field. This is a highly important time of preparation and personal development that will be hugely valuable when overseas or in an unfamiliar situation. The Bible is full of examples of mentor: Elijah and Elisha, Barnabas and Paul, and it is for good reason.

Mentoring lets you learn from those with experience, helping to stop you making the same mistakes as they may have made and to talk through any worries or concerns you have. Mentoring can also help in the preparation of entering a new culture. Nothing can entirely prepare you for a mission trip, but it's worth trying to be as prepared as you can. Joining a mission agency can be a great way of doing this and the mentoring you receive could change your life forever.

2. Church Relationships and networks

Your sending church will have many questions arising from their pastoral concern for you and your family. Partnering with a mission agency will help to address issues of ongoing care and ministry support, in-field training, security, secure communication, and advice on direct church involvement.

An agency helps to shoulder the burden of responsibility for a worker's safety, health and supervision in ministry. They provide advice on the wise placement of workers, expertise on the field, and contacts in the host country.

Furthermore, joining a mission agency brings an accountability to the work you are doing, making it more likely that a church will choose to support you and continue supporting you in future projects.

3. Prayer Support

We believe that prayer is powerful and effective. Joining a mission agency ensures that you will be prayed for and that you always have a natural place to turn to when seeking prayer support. A mission agency can also get their wider network of supporters to join with a particular cause in prayer.

Additionally, knowing that people are praying for you can be a great encouragement when on mission, helping you to persevere when things get tough and sharing your joy when things go well.

4. Practical Support

When on the mission field, it is likely that things may not quite go to plan; having the practical support of a mission agency can make all the difference. Whether it's in helping you to prepare beforehand, booking flights and visas or on-the-ground support, the experience, knowledge and resources of a mission agency are highly valuable. This can be especially necessary in the event of an emergency, or in an unstable region, where an agency can do all they can to ensure the safety of their workers. Not being part of an organisation may increase the risk if something does go wrong.

5. Team Relationships on the Field

Your personal call is important, but you cannot fulfil your mission alone. A mission agency will help you identify and fit into the right team who share your vision. A team can model Christian community to unreached peoples, especially an international team. Being in a team can be incredibly rewarding (and fun), as well as helping you work more effectively, utilising the skills and abilities of a group of people to achieve more.

Being on the mission field can feel quite isolating at times and a good relationship with a team can offer emotional support. Team members that share an ethos of mission can encourage and pray with each other in the hard times. A team can provide invaluable fellowship and support. For those times where team relationships break down, having the support of a mission agency can aid in conflict resolution.

A mission agency may help in the recruiting and formation of a team, as well as in training a team to perform well. Even when not part of a local team, being part of a mission agency also means that you are part of a wider team, helping you feel part of the cause.

Five factors to consider when selecting

Different agencies may have a different emphasis, a different background, a different approach to situations, different theology and may work in different parts of the world. These distinctions may help in choosing an agency which is right for you.

1. Core Values

You can tell a lot about an organisation from their core values so they may help in determining if you would be interested in joining it. For instance when looking at leadership, do they consider the same things important for leadership that you do? Use this time to explore whether their values, as well as your own, are seeking after God's will and intentions for sharing the Good News

If you feel a particular passion or calling for a type of work, or a particular part of the world, it may be helpful to consider this in choosing an agency. However, exploring agencies which don't necessarily offer the work you'd initially be interested in may help you to discover other areas of interest, so don't feel too constrained by your first thoughts.

2. Statement of Faith

As well as their other core values, the agency itself may have a particular denominational or theological position which may be worth thinking about. That may not be a concern, but if differing views are likely to become a particular area of friction, then it may be worth considering other options. Looking at an organisation's statement of faith is a good way of understanding their beliefs and seeing whether you would fit into it: if there are too many areas of disagreement with this, it may be a cause of dispute and disunity.

Furthermore, working amongst Christians overseas may highlight some of these areas, causing deeper issues.

Minor disagreements with a statement of faith may not be an issue, but discuss these with the agency: many agencies have a level of flexibility and grace on more minor issues. If in doubt, ask.

3. History and Origins

Although by no means conclusive, an organisation's history may help to show you something of their current ethos. Sometimes an agency is still defined by the initial vision of their founders, whereas sometimes they may have moved away from this. If you want to be a part of a great tradition, finding out an agency's history may help you decide between agencies, but don't be too worried by it if their present reputation is good.

4. Reputation

The reputation of a mission agency may be a useful way of decided between agencies, provided that reputation is fair.

What work does the agency primarily focus on: evangelism, development, advocacy, disaster relief or a mixture of these? The way that an agency conducts its work may also be found in their core values. Do they typically use local partners? Are mission workers sent in teams, or as individuals? Is the focus mainly on short-term trips, or long term projects?

Consult family, friends and those at church to see what the general opinion of the organisation is. Does anyone you know currently support the agency? Why/why not? Has anyone worked for them? Not only should they have a good reputation in caring for their mission workers, but their work should be ethical and effective.

Although a reputation may not give the whole picture, all these things should hopefully give a good idea of if you would want to be a part of a particular agency.

5. The Lord's guidance

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths." Proverbs 3:5-6

Finally, pray and trust in God. He will open the door to the right mission agency for you. As long as you are seeking to please Him, He will bless you in the decision you make when choosing a mission agency.

Get in touch

We hope you can see from this short guide that there are many good reasons to partner with a mission agency. There are many great organisations to choose from. Why not get in touch and begin a conversations? Let's explore together whether the Lord is leading you to make an impact for His Kingdom through one of our church-planting teams.

Contact us on awmuk@awm-pioneers.org or 01509 239 525 or complete a preliminary information form with your interests in mission.

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