

**Guidelines to help US partner congregations and their teams work effectively in Central American communities or congregations.**

**Version: June 2013**

**NOTE:** CALMS encourages all our teams to work with long-term commitments (approximately five years) to help a Central American congregation become healthier and to impact its community with the Gospel or to help a Central American community become a healthier place physically, educationally, and spiritually.

1. **Meet with the community or congregational leaders in order to demonstrate respect for local structures and to build relationships with the existing leadership.** Seek to assess the level of leadership competency by finding out what the leaders are already doing to help their community and how well they work together. **NOTE:** Most communities have some kind of leadership structure with elected or appointed leaders. It is also important to meet spiritual, medical and educational leaders.
2. **Look, listen and ask good questions in order to learn.** This is especially important in the initial stages of contact with a new potential partner congregation or community. But even after we know the situation and our Central American partners better, we need to keep learning!
3. **Begin with a conversation about the communities resources rather than what they need.** This focus helps them and you to focus on what they have rather than what they do not have. Such conversations can also help US volunteers avoid the mistake of assuming that Central Americans can't do anything to help themselves and may suggest potential future healthy projects that your team could do together with the community to help their community become a healthier one.
4. **Focus on relationships and on "being" rather than "doing."** This is especially important in the first contacts with a new community. Central Americans are highly relational, so it is important to spend time getting to know them and helping them get to know you. **NOTE:** This focus on relationships is also why we encourage long-term commitments to a specific Central American community or ministry in order to encourage growing trust.
5. **Avoid promising anything.** CALMS' philosophy is to "under-promise and "over-deliver." In other words, if we agree to do something, we should actually follow through and even go beyond what was agreed!
6. **Avoid unintended consequences.** Things are not always as they seem. Always ask if you are uncertain about what to do or say about a certain situation. Work with your cultural helpers especially your CALMS' national staff members if you aren't sure about something. Without realizing it, your "innocent" action and well-intentioned gesture or words can create confusion and cause CALMS and our local partners to have to spend time trying to resolve a problem that did not need to exist in the first place.
7. **Do not give money or items to any individual and report to your CALMS' representative any requests and seek their advice and input prior to any action.** We do sometimes help an individual, but we like to check with the appropriate local leaders and cultural helpers in order to fully understand the situation. When we do help individuals, we usually do that in appropriate ways through local structures or cross-cultural helpers such as a CALMS' representative. For example, one of our teams helped a young father who had become paralyzed by a work-related accident by providing him with the resources to start a home

business to help support his family. We discussed this project with the community leaders and with the family in order to make sure that our help would be seen in a positive light by the whole community. We also need to help in ways that do not create an expectation that anytime Americans are present, local people can expect free things to be given out. This can exacerbate an existing dependency problem and may do more harm than good.

8. **Share your Christian witness, God's Word and prayer from the very first contact, focusing on Jesus and why He means so much to you.** CALMS' wants to be known as people who know Jesus and talk about him. We want to both proclaim and demonstrate God's love in sensitive and effective ways. Offer to pray for people you meet and actually pray with them if it seems appropriate to do so.
9. **Underscore CALMS' and your group's commitment to helping any existing churches in the target community with capacity building, Bibles, Christian education resources, etc. in order to extend God's kingdom without dividing the community.** Avoid speaking negatively about any church. CALMS seeks to help new communities see us and our teams as people of peace who unify rather than people who divide or create conflict.
10. **Make sure in any conversations about our intentions with regard to existing churches or our motives, that you let people know we are not planning to obligate people to "change their religion," but instead, help them to know Jesus better and serve him.** Roman Catholic people are often indoctrinated to see other Christians from evangelical or Pentecostal backgrounds as representing another totally separate religion instead of seeing them as fellow Christians.
11. **Support projects that benefit the whole community rather than a single family or individual—especially at the initial stages of ministry.** If an outside individual or group supports an individual, the help given tends to create jealousy and disunity among the community members.
12. **Always involve local people in any activity or project that your team is involved in.** Sometimes this involvement may be in the form of know-how or sweat equity, but it is important that they contribute to every project in order to avoid the trap of dependency.
13. **Begin with a pilot project** after your team has established a solid relationship with a community, learned more about the community and when you feel you are ready to begin doing something more concrete.
14. **Once a solid relationship has been established with a community, work with CALMS to establish a more formal long-term covenant.** This is especially important prior to initiating any significant ministry or project. A covenant should describe what we will do, what they will do and what we will do together. A strategy describes how we will go forward.
15. **Begin any project with the end in mind and agree with CALMS and the local partners about the desired outcomes—what it should look like if the project is done as well as possible.** Actually write this down so you can later evaluate how close to the outcomes your team came.
16. **Work with CALMS to develop a strategy to describe the steps you will take with your Central American partners in order to achieve the desired outcomes.** Understand that the strategy will need to change and be updated on an on-going basis. Follow CALMS' mission philosophy and values as consistently as possible and use them as to help you make decisions.
17. **Build trust by keeping any commitments made after prayer and dialog with CALMS and our Central American partners.** Trust happens as we consistently keep our promises over time.