

Community Research

Prepared by: Stan Granberg | Date: September 4, 2010

Level One: TOPOGRAPHICAL

THE WHY?

Research is the foundation for knowledge and accurate knowledge is often the difference between good decisions and poor decisions, between plans that work and those that don't. James Engel, a church researcher says, "Research is the gathering of information for use in decision making" (Engel, 1977, p. 13).

In the past decade the missional church movement has brought to light that church planting is a mission endeavor. Effective missionaries are people who have spent time learning their people. They know not only how to talk with them (language) but they know how they think and often why they think the way they do. This is the key to contextualizing the message of Christ so that people can hear and understand it in order to make an informed decision about their life in relationship to Jesus.

As church planters you have already invested a great deal of time, energy and finances into putting together a ministry plan at the Church Planter Training Lab. Now, as you lay the groundwork for the time your new churches will publicly launch, you need to learn the context in which you will work. And just like a missionary you need to learn the people among whom you will minister.

Acts 16:11-15

Paul's missionary band had reached the shores of Greece and moved inland to the first major city: Philippi. As Greek speakers (though Greek was probably not Paul's mother tongue) Paul, Timothy, Luke, and Silas these missionaries did not have to learn language, but they were going to have to learn how to talk with Greek-thinking people.

Notice the descriptive language Luke uses here as they enter new territory. List some of the details Luke provides us.

In just a brief statement Luke gives us political background, economic orientation, and ethnic insight and religious sentiments that colored the mission ministry in Philippi. Either Luke had a great memory or these bits of information were critical pieces of research that the mission team picked up in their survey of Philippi and its environs. I tend to believe the latter.

How do you think they accomplished this survey of Philippi? What methods of research might they have used?

THE HOW?

Over the next month you will be researching your community in order to produce a Community Survey. You will use three tools to help you accomplish this task:

1. Demographic information from the US Census Bureau
2. Making your own Community Map
3. Developing a People Profile

This month your focus will be on the first two items. The demographic information and Community Map provide the data you need to answer the question "Who are these people?" (Keller and Thompson, 2002, p. 79).

Demographic Survey

Your demographic survey is based on the US Census information provided by the US government at www.census.gov. Log onto this website, then look for MapFacts. You will be able to download information for States, counties and cities.

The North American Mission Board (NAMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention provides a very helpful guide to interpreting the census data and tying it into a strategy for church planting. Download their pdf file at http://www.churchplantingvillage.net/v3_pages/7Steps_Partners/2000%20Demographic%20Guide.pdf. A copy of their introduction and the first two items of census data is included here in your notebook.

Assignment: Use the information provided to develop a Demographic Profile of your target community. Use Excel or other spreadsheet program to prepare graphs of the information on the following:

1. Ages
2. Race (only the significant populations)
3. Family composition
4. Educational Attainment
5. Income
6. Households by Type
7. Year Housing Units Built
8. Year Householder Moved in Unit

Generally pie graphs will show what you want to know.

Product: Develop a Demographic Survey Report on your target community that covers the 8 topics listed above.

1. Begin with a brief summary describing your community from the data
2. For each topic:
 - a. Present the data in both graph and table form
 - b. Provide a written summary of the information
 - c. Make linkages to evangelistic approaches or implications
3. Prepare a 10 minute (max.) PowerPoint presentation to present at our next meeting and email each participant a copy of the Demographic Survey Report

Community Mapping

We are familiar with street maps that help us get to our desired destinations. We also need good maps to help us understand our target communities. Since the maps we need are not for sale, as good cultural navigators we will produce our maps.

Assignment: Produce a map of your community. You have a number of tools at your disposal to accomplish this. Begin by identifying a geographic center for your community. The results of research at Cascade College

have shown that a 2-½ mile radius from this geographic center is your high priority zone. You will find that over 75% of your members will come from this area until you grow to 300. At that point your high impact zone will move out to a 5-mile radius. To get a closer feel take walking tours, meet people, ask basic questions about the specific area you are in. Use your core team as co-investigators in this project. You might want to divide up areas of the community or zones. This is a great opportunity to develop a sense of teamwork.

Your map needs to identify the following 6 zones:

1. Residential zones – single family housing, multiple family housing and single family rental areas
2. Commercial zones – shopping, traffic patterns, types of activity, etc.
3. Public zones – schools, parks, libraries and other public facilities
4. Religious zones – locate churches and their affiliations. Use the Church Survey to gather more detailed information that will give you depth in this area
5. Economic zones – use housing values to identify lower income, middle income and higher income areas.
6. Spiritual Strongholds – temples, mosques, LDS; liquor stores, places of prostitution and drug dependency

THE RESULTS

What you will gain from these projects is more than paper and a map. Here are three results you should look to receive from these projects.

1. A vision for your city or community. Every community is comprised of a variety of distinct elements and groups of people. Each group has its own set of issues it faces, fears it carries and concerns it deals with. The work you will do here will help you see your community more accurately so that God can bring His vision of this new church more clearly to your heart and mind.
2. A belief that the theological and practical expressions of Christianity you carry are actually needed in this community. In our own mission team in Kenya we had some who early on lost sight—and lost belief—in the fact that we had something vital to share with the people God had called us to. You should also keep your eyes open to see you this community will be impacted/changed by the Gospel as you present God to them.
3. A focus for your prayers for your community. You may yet to have many names of people to pray for, but you should have a deep sense of where they live and work, where they spend their time, the challenges and joys they have, and the spiritual needs that God will reveal to you.

RESOURCES

Aldrich, Joe. *Prayer Summits: Seeking God's Agenda for Your Community*. Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1992.

Dennison, Jack. *City Reaching: On the Road to Community Transformation*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1999.

Engel, James. *How Can I get them to Listen?* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1977.

Keller, Timothy J. & Thompson, J. Allen. *Church Planter Manual*. New York: Redeemer Church Planting Center, 2002.

Lewis, Bob. *The Church of Irresistible Influence*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003.

Otis, George, Jr. *Spiritual Mapping Field Guide: North American Edition*. Lynnwood, WA: The Sentinel Group, 1993.

Otis, George, Jr. *Informed Intercession*. Ventura: Renew Books, 1999.

Silvoso, Ed. *Biblical Principles for Reaching Our Cities for Christ*. San Joes, CA: Harvest Evangelism, 1993.

Silvoso, Ed. *That None Should Perish: How to Reach Entire Cities for Christ Through Prayer Evangelism*.
Ventura, CA: Regal, 1994.

Waymire, Bob. *The City Survey Data Guide*. Etna, CA: Light International, 1999.

Waymire, Bob & Townsend, Carl. *Discovering Your City*. Etna, CA: Light International, 2000.