

KINGDOM-MINDED COLLABORATION

Referring Candidates to Other Organizations

Missionary Mobilization Research Project for Missio Nexus

Research Base: Structured interviews with mobilization leaders from 18+ mission organizations
2025 Launch Survey data (2,400+ respondents) and performance metrics from 77 organizations

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Introduction

There is a practice that distinguishes top-performing mission organizations from the rest, and it is perhaps the most counterintuitive one: willingly, enthusiastically referring candidates to other organizations when they would be better served elsewhere. Rather than viewing candidate referrals as lost opportunities, the highest-performing mobilizers treat them as kingdom investments that ultimately return dividends to everyone involved, including their own organizations.

This paper explores what the research calls "kingdom-minded collaboration": the philosophy, practice, and infrastructure of referring candidates to better-fit organizations as an act of faithful stewardship. Based on structured interviews with mobilization leaders from 18+ mission organizations, analysis of the 2025 Launch Survey (2,400+ respondents), and performance data from 77 organizations, this research demonstrates that candidate referral is not merely a nice-to-have practice but a hallmark of organizational maturity and kingdom orientation.

The 2025 Launch Survey reveals a striking data point: 68% of Gen Z candidates contact multiple organizations before settling on one, compared to 40% of Gen X candidates. This means the majority of candidates who arrive at any given organization's door have already been, or will soon be, talking to other agencies. Organizations that embrace this reality with gracious, kingdom-minded responses build immense credibility. Those that resist it, or that attempt to hold candidates possessively, ultimately undermine their own effectiveness.

Part 1: The Theology and Philosophy of Kingdom Collaboration

The Biblical Foundation

Kingdom-minded collaboration in missionary mobilization flows directly from a theological conviction about who owns the mission. The Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 was given to the church, not to any particular mission agency. The Antioch church in Acts 13 did not send Paul and Barnabas to plant churches in service of

Antioch's organizational growth; they sent them in response to the Holy Spirit's direction, to advance God's kingdom regardless of where that led.

This theological grounding has direct implications for mobilization practice. If the mission belongs to God and the church is its steward, then mission organizations are servant-agencies facilitating kingdom advance, not sovereign entities with franchise rights over their candidates. A mobilizer who understands this will ask not "How can I get this person to join our organization?" but "How can I help this person faithfully respond to God's call?" Those are not the same question, and organizations that confuse them make costly errors.

Paul's language in 1 Corinthians 3:5-9 is instructive: servants of the Lord assigned to different tasks, each contributing to a single harvest that belongs to God. A mobilizer who refers a candidate to a better-fit organization is not losing a recruit; they are assigning the right worker to the right field in God's global harvest. The outcome glorifies God whether the candidate serves through that organization or another.

The Organizational Temptation

Despite this clear theological foundation, organizational forces often pull mobilizers toward competitive rather than collaborative behavior. The pressures are real and understandable. Most mission organizations measure success by the number of missionaries deployed. Mobilizers are evaluated on how many applications they generate. Leadership celebrates when someone joins; the departure of a candidate to another agency may register as a failure rather than a kingdom success.

These metrics create incentive structures that subtly undermine kingdom collaboration. A mobilizer who knows that a candidate would be a better fit with Organization Y but faces pressure to fill her organization's pipeline faces a genuine tension between institutional loyalty and kingdom faithfulness. Without intentional philosophical grounding and organizational permission, the institutional pressure typically wins.

One interviewee from a mid-sized agency described the tension: "There's always pressure to hit your numbers. If I refer someone away, that looks like a loss on my spreadsheet. But when I stopped thinking about my metrics and started thinking about kingdom metrics, everything shifted. I realized that a poorly placed missionary is far more expensive, financially and in terms of human cost, than a candidate I referred to a better-fit organization. Kingdom thinking is actually better organizational thinking when you extend the time horizon."

How Referrals Ultimately Serve the Referring Organization

Kingdom-minded collaboration is not merely self-sacrificial; it produces concrete benefits for organizations that practice it consistently. The research identified five mechanisms through which referrals ultimately benefit the referring organization.

- Reputation and trust. Candidates who experience genuine care for their calling, regardless of whether they ultimately join that organization, build deep trust. They

tell others about the experience. One interviewee reported that several of their best candidates came through referrals from other organizations specifically because those candidates had heard this organization would give them honest guidance rather than a sales pitch.

- Reciprocal referrals. Multiple interviewees described calling other agencies to say "I've got somebody I think would be a great fit for you," and seeing those referrals reciprocated over time. Organizations known for kingdom-minded collaboration receive referrals from peer organizations. The candidate pool grows through mutual trust rather than zero-sum competition.
- Higher quality applicants. When organizations stop attempting to force-fit candidates, those who do apply represent genuine fits. Conversion rates improve because mobilizers are no longer investing in candidates who were never right for them. One organization reported that after shifting to a kingdom-minded model, their application-to-deployment ratio improved significantly even as total application volume declined.
- Return candidates. Circumstances change. A candidate referred to Organization Y because they needed a specific geographic focus may find years later that their circumstances align better with the original organization. Candidates who were treated with respect and care often return. Those who felt pressured or manipulated rarely do.
- Advocacy networks. The 2025 Launch Survey data confirms that missionary referrals consistently outperform digital marketing and conference recruiting, with some organizations seeing 90-95% of applicants coming through existing missionary connections. Missionaries from other organizations who were well-served in their discernment process become advocates. They recommend the organization to others.

Part 2: When and How to Refer

Recognizing When Another Organization Is a Better Fit

Effective referral begins with accurate assessment. Mobilizers who practice kingdom collaboration have trained themselves to identify signals indicating that a candidate would be better served by a different organization. The most common misalignment categories warranting referral include the following.

Doctrinal or Theological Misalignment

Organizations carry specific doctrinal commitments that represent genuine convictions, not arbitrary preferences. A candidate whose theological convictions are substantively different from the organization's is not a poor candidate for missions; they are simply a poor candidate for that particular organization. The most loving response is to acknowledge the misalignment clearly and point toward organizations with better theological fit.

One interviewee described a situation in which a highly qualified candidate applied whose theological convictions were incompatible with the organization's position. Rather than attempting to paper over the difference, the mobilizer said: "I have deep respect for where you're coming from theologically. I think you're going to make an outstanding missionary. And I think you'd thrive with Organization X, which shares your theological convictions and works in the region you're called to. Can I introduce you to their mobilizer?" The candidate ultimately served fruitfully elsewhere, and later referred two others to the original agency when their theological profile was a match.

Geographic Focus and Field Access

Organizations cannot be everywhere, and candidates increasingly arrive with specific geographic callings. A candidate called to Japan deserves an organization with deep roots in Japan. A candidate called to restricted-access countries needs an organization with both expertise and infrastructure in creative-access ministry.

One mobilizer at a mid-sized agency described their practice: "Our organization doesn't work in Japan. If I have somebody very interested in Japan specifically, I refer them to Send International. I know the director of mobilization personally. I always give the candidate his contact, then email him directly and say, here's this person's contact information, they're interested in Japan. We don't do a lot of medical ministry, but I know SIM has a lot of medical ministry, so we'll refer somebody to SIM. There's just different groups we've known because we've been intentional to network, and we're happy to make that connection."

Ministry Approach Differences

Different organizations reflect meaningfully different philosophies of missionary work: church planting versus development, urban versus rural, tent-making versus fully supported ministry, pioneer versus established-church contexts. A candidate with a clear vision for a specific type of ministry who is matched with an organization whose approach is fundamentally different will likely experience frustration and underperformance on both sides.

The discovery conversation is the primary tool for surfacing ministry approach alignment or misalignment. Effective mobilizers ask questions like: "Describe what you envision your work actually looking like on a given day." "What kind of team structure do you thrive in?" "How do you think about the relationship between evangelism and community development?" The answers reveal alignment with particular organizational cultures.

The Referral Conversation: Practical Guidance

Knowing when to refer is only part of the challenge. Having the conversation well matters enormously. A poorly executed referral can feel like rejection, while a well-executed one can feel like the most caring thing a mobilizer has done for a candidate. The following principles guide effective referral conversations.

1. Lead with affirmation of calling, not rejection. Begin by affirming what you have observed in the candidate: their evident calling, gifts, preparation, and character. Make clear that the conversation is about fit, not inadequacy. "I've been really encouraged by what I've seen in you in our conversations. You have a clear sense of calling and genuine gifts for this work."
2. Be specific about why the fit is incomplete. Vague redirections feel dismissive. Naming the specific misalignment respectfully, whether doctrinal, geographic, or approach-related, communicates that you have actually understood the candidate and thought carefully about their situation.
3. Offer a specific organization, not just a category. "You might want to look at other agencies" is unhelpful. "I want to personally introduce you to Sarah at Organization X, who I think would be a great fit for you" is genuinely useful. The more specific and warm the referral, the more likely the candidate will follow through.
4. Complete the referral actively, not passively. The best mobilizers do not simply give a name and step back. They send an email or make a call introducing the candidate to their contact at the receiving organization, often including a brief summary of what they have learned about the candidate and why they think the fit is good. This warm handoff dramatically increases follow-through rates on both sides.
5. Maintain the relationship after the referral. A brief follow-up, "How did your conversation with Sarah go?", costs almost nothing and communicates continued care. It also keeps the mobilizer informed about how the referral landed, providing useful feedback for future referrals.

The Three-Pathway Model

One large sending organization described a structured approach to candidate routing that provides a useful framework. Rather than treating the question of fit as binary, they describe a three-pathway model:

Pathway One: Strong fit for the organization's primary deployment pipeline. The candidate's calling, theology, skills, and geographic interest align well.

Pathway Two: Good fit with the organization's values, but interested in a geographic context where the organization doesn't have a primary presence. A formal sending collective enables deployment through partnership with other organizations.

Pathway Three: Not a strong fit for this organization's primary or partnership deployments. The candidate needs a different organizational home. The mobilizer's role is to help the candidate identify and connect with a better-suited agency.

This framework is noteworthy for what it assumes: that the third pathway is a legitimate organizational outcome, not a failure. Building that assumption into the organizational model normalizes referral as a feature rather than a flaw.

Part 3: Building Referral Networks

Knowing Your Peers Well Enough to Refer Specifically

A mobilizer cannot make quality referrals without knowledge of peer organizations. This knowledge does not accumulate automatically; it requires intentional investment. The most effective mobilizers are students of the mission agency landscape: they know what organizations focus on what geographies, what ministry approaches, what theological traditions, and what candidate profiles.

One mobilizer described building this knowledge systematically: "When we're at conferences or when we're at campuses, I try to learn what the other organizations who are there with us do. Who do they place? Where do they work? What's their theology? What kind of candidate thrives with them? That way, when I have somebody who isn't a fit for us, I can give them a specific referral, not just 'check out some other agencies' but 'you should call this person at this organization because they specialize in exactly what you're describing.'"

Formal Collaboration Networks

Some organizations have formalized their collaborative relationships through structured networks. The Sending Collective model is one prominent example: a formal partnership structure that enables candidates to be processed through the originating organization's infrastructure and deployed in partnership with other organizations in contexts where the originating agency lacks a field presence.

Third-party connector organizations represent another form of formal network. The 2025 Launch Survey identifies organizations serving as intermediary connectors, helping candidates navigate the landscape of mission agencies and find appropriate organizational fits. These connectors are particularly valuable for candidates earlier in their discernment process, still exploring which type of ministry and organizational culture matches their calling.

Informal Mobilizer Relationships

The majority of effective referrals in the research emerged not from formal organizational structures but from personal relationships between individual mobilizers at different agencies. These relationships develop through shared conference attendance, mutual acquaintance networks, and intentional relationship-building across organizational lines.

One mobilizer described the practical benefit: "When I refer someone to another organization, I don't just give them a website. I give them the name of a specific person I know and trust. I tell them 'Call Sarah and tell her I sent you.' Then I email Sarah and say, 'I'm sending you someone. Here's what I've learned about them in our conversations.' That warm handoff changes everything. The candidate feels cared for rather than discarded. Sarah follows up quickly because it came from a trusted

colleague. And Sarah does the same for me when she has someone who fits us better than her organization."

These relationships develop through intentional investment. Mobilizers who attend Missio Nexus gatherings and similar conferences should approach those events not only as opportunities to represent their own organization but as occasions to invest in peer relationships across organizational lines. Over time, these investments compound into a network of trusted colleagues who collectively serve the broader candidate population far better than any single organization could alone.

Reciprocal Referral Patterns

The research consistently surfaced a pattern of reciprocity among organizations that practice kingdom collaboration actively. Organizations that refer well receive referrals. Mobilizers who have been the recipients of thoughtful, well-executed referrals from peer organizations remember those experiences. When they encounter candidates who would fit those organizations better, they make the connection.

This reciprocity is not transactional; mobilizers who refer with the expectation of immediate return will be disappointed. But over time, consistent kingdom-minded behavior builds a reputation that generates both direct referrals from peer mobilizers and indirect referrals from candidates who speak well of the organization to others exploring their options. One survey respondent captured this dynamic: "The various organizations' staffers impressed upon me that they are colleagues in mission, not competitors, for God's Kingdom glory."

Part 4: The Candidate Experience of Kingdom Collaboration

What the Launch Survey Reveals

The 2025 Launch Survey included an open-ended question asking missionaries who had relocated for the gospel about previous contact with staffers from different organizations before joining their current one. The 83 responses provide direct evidence of the candidate experience of inter-organizational encounters. The findings are clear: how organizations handle encounters with candidates they will not ultimately deploy significantly shapes those candidates' journeys and impressions of the mission community as a whole.

The Seed-Planting Effect

Perhaps the most striking finding from the survey is what might be called the "seed-planting effect." Multiple respondents described how conversations with staffers from organizations they did not ultimately join shaped their discernment in ways they only later recognized as formative.

One respondent wrote: "I felt like each time I reached out to talk with someone from a different organization, they planted a little seed in my heart and helped form my opinions about what I wanted to do." Another noted: "I had positive interactions with staffers from 3-4 different organizations. Each conversation helped me clarify what I was looking for and what was important to me."

This finding has significant implications for how mobilizers should understand their role even with candidates who will not ultimately join their organization. Every conversation with a genuine candidate is an act of kingdom service, planting seeds of clarity, building trust in mission organizations generally, and contributing to the eventual fruitfulness of a missionary who may serve with an entirely different agency. The mobilizer's work matters far beyond the candidates who join their own organization.

The Impact of Kingdom-Minded Referrals on Final Placement

Several survey respondents described specific instances in which a kingdom-minded referral from one organization directly led to finding their missionary home. One respondent wrote: "A staff member from another organization ultimately connected me with my current ministry when they heard about the skills I had and how I would like to serve." Another: "The first organization I contacted wasn't a good fit theologically, but they were gracious and pointed me toward organizations that would align better with my beliefs."

The contrast with gatekeeping experiences was equally stark. One respondent described an encounter with an organization whose staffer was "extremely unhelpful. I had to know the people group in the Middle East that I wanted to serve at the table before they would even talk to me." This approach, requiring specificity before even entering into relationship, communicated that the organization valued organizational efficiency over candidate care. The memory of that encounter remained negative years after the candidate had been serving fruitfully elsewhere.

Gen Z and the Multi-Organization Exploration Pattern

The 2025 Launch Survey documents a significant generational shift: 68% of Gen Z candidates contact multiple organizations before settling on one, compared to 40% of Gen X candidates. Organizations cannot assume that a candidate who reaches out is exploring them exclusively. Attempts to discourage this exploration or to establish exclusive relationships before trust is earned typically backfire with this generation.

The opportunity is significant: organizations that embrace this exploration pattern and position themselves as helpful guides in it, rather than competitors trying to win market share, build profound trust with Gen Z candidates. When a mobilizer says "I want to help you find the right fit, even if that's not us," that posture resonates deeply with a generation acutely sensitive to authenticity and deeply suspicious of institutional sales dynamics.

Part 5: Organizational Implementation

Creating Organizational Permission for Kingdom Collaboration

Individual mobilizers cannot consistently practice kingdom-minded referral without organizational permission. If the organizational culture, metrics, and leadership messaging communicate that candidates who don't join represent failures, mobilizers will feel, consciously or unconsciously, that referring candidates away is a threat to their standing.

Organizational permission for kingdom collaboration includes several elements. Leadership must celebrate kingdom wins, not only organizational wins. When a mobilizer refers a candidate to another agency and that candidate flourishes on the field, leadership should recognize and affirm that outcome. If referrals are never mentioned while organizational applications are always celebrated, the implicit message is clear: only organizational growth counts.

Metrics must be redesigned to capture kingdom impact alongside organizational results. Some organizations are beginning to track not only how many candidates they deploy but how many they serve in the discernment process, including those referred to other agencies. This broader measurement framework enables mobilizers to understand their work as kingdom service rather than organizational recruitment.

Training Mobilizers for Kingdom-Minded Conversations

Even mobilizers who hold kingdom-minded values sometimes lack the practical conversational skills to execute referrals well. Training in referral conversations is a distinct skill set that organizations should develop intentionally.

Training should include practice in the specific language of referral conversations: how to affirm calling while naming misalignment, how to make specific rather than generic referrals, and how to complete the handoff actively. Role-playing exercises using real misalignment scenarios help mobilizers develop fluency in these conversations before facing them with actual candidates.

Training should also include knowledge of the broader mission agency landscape. New mobilizers benefit from structured introductions to peer organizations: their focus areas, theological distinctives, candidate profiles, and key contacts. Some organizations formalize this through "agency tours" in which new mobilizers spend time learning about peer organizations, or through shared gatherings where mobilizers from multiple agencies get to know each other personally.

The Tension Between Organizational and Kingdom Loyalty

It would be naive to pretend that the tension between organizational and kingdom loyalty is entirely resolvable. Mission organizations need candidates to survive and thrive. Mobilizers are hired and compensated by their organizations, not by the broader

kingdom ecosystem. These realities create genuine tensions that are not dissolved by theological vision alone.

The research suggests that the most effective organizations navigate this tension by expanding the time horizon of organizational success. In the short term, referring a well-qualified candidate to another agency may feel like a loss. Over a three-to-five-year horizon, organizations that practice consistent kingdom collaboration build reputations, relationships, and reciprocal referral networks that generate more and better-fit candidates than competitive hoarding ever could.

One interviewee from a large sending organization acknowledged the tension directly: the organization wants mobilizers to explore internal fit first, then partnership pathways, and then, if neither works, to help the candidate find a different organizational home entirely, off-ramping them in a healthy way. The key phrase is "off-ramp them in a healthy way": the referral is understood as a service to the candidate, not an organizational failure.

Conclusion: Toward a Culture of Kingdom Collaboration

The practice of kingdom-minded collaboration in missionary mobilization is ultimately a theological issue before it is a strategic one. Organizations that view themselves as stewards of the Great Commission rather than proprietors of their candidate pipeline will naturally tend toward collaboration. Those that view organizational growth as the primary measure of success will tend toward competition.

The research is unambiguous: kingdom-minded organizations that practice consistent, gracious, specific referral of candidates to better-fit agencies build reputations that serve their own organizational health, build relationships that generate reciprocal referrals, and ultimately deploy more fruitful missionaries than organizations that attempt to hoard candidates.

The fundamental orientation is captured in a phrase that appeared repeatedly across the interviews: "We're mobilizers, not recruiters. We help people discern what God is doing in their lives, even if that means they serve elsewhere." This posture, genuine care for the candidate's calling rather than organizational acquisition, is the wellspring from which all effective kingdom collaboration flows.

For organizations willing to make this philosophical commitment and build the practical infrastructure to support it, the rewards are substantial: deeper candidate relationships, better organizational reputation, reciprocal referral networks, higher-quality applicants, and the confidence of having served the kingdom rather than merely the institution.

Discussion Questions for Organizational Leaders and Mobilization Teams

6. What percentage of candidates who engage with your organization are ultimately referred to other agencies? Do you track this metric? What would tracking it reveal about your current practice?
7. How does your organization's metric structure and leadership communication reward or discourage kingdom-minded referrals? What changes would align your incentive structures with kingdom values?
8. Do your mobilizers know peer organizations well enough to make specific, warm referrals, or would they need to offer only generic redirections? What investment would build the necessary knowledge?
9. What personal relationships do your mobilizers have with mobilizers at peer organizations? How are those relationships cultivated, and how might your organization invest in their development?
10. The research shows that 68% of Gen Z candidates contact multiple organizations. How does your organization currently respond to this reality? Does your posture toward multi-organizational exploration communicate welcome or resistance?
11. Have you received referrals from peer organizations? What generated those referrals, and what does that suggest about how you might build a stronger referral network?
12. How are your mobilizers currently trained to handle referral conversations? Do they have practiced language and specific contacts for making warm referrals, or do they typically offer only generic redirections?
13. Consider a candidate you referred to another organization in the past year. Was that referral warm and specific, or generic? Did you follow up to learn how it landed? What would a more intentional approach to that referral have looked like?
14. The research suggests that every mobilizer conversation with a genuine candidate plants seeds of discernment, regardless of whether that candidate ultimately joins your organization. How does this perspective change how you understand the purpose and value of your work?
15. What would it look like for your organization to formally adopt the posture "We are mobilizers, not recruiters; we help people discern what God is doing in their lives, even if that means they serve elsewhere"? What would need to change in your culture, metrics, training, and leadership communication?

Research Methodology Note

This paper draws on structured interviews with mobilization leaders from 18+ mission organizations, including ABWE, Action International, AIM, Avant, Compel Global, Crossworld, East-West Ministries, FIM, Globe International, Gospel Mobilization, IMB, International Friendships, Launch Global, MAF, Mesa Global, Pioneers, Send International, and Serge. Interview questions were standardized across all organizations to enable cross-organizational comparison while allowing for organizational specificity. Individual organizations are attributed generically throughout to protect the candor of responses, except where publicly known programs or initiatives are described.

Quantitative data referenced in this paper comes from the 2025 Launch Survey conducted by Gospel Mobilization, with 2,400+ respondents including both aspiring missionaries and those already serving. Additional performance metric data draws from a broader sample of 77 mission organizations.