

KINGDOM-MINDED COLLABORATION

Referring Candidates to Other Organizations

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Missionary Mobilization Research Project for Missio Nexus | Mark Harris, Researcher | February 2026

Core Finding: The willingness to refer candidates to better-fit organizations is among the most distinctive practices of top-performing mission agencies. Organizations that practice kingdom-minded collaboration build reputations, receive reciprocal referrals, attract higher-quality applicants, and ultimately deploy more fruitful missionaries than those that compete for candidates possessively.

KEY DATA POINT

68% of Gen Z candidates contact multiple organizations before settling on one, vs. 40% of Gen X candidates (2025 Launch Survey). This generational shift makes kingdom-minded collaboration not merely admirable but strategically essential.

The Problem with Organizational Hoarding

Most mission organizations measure success by number of missionaries deployed. This metric, applied without nuance, creates incentive structures that push mobilizers toward competitive rather than collaborative behavior. Mobilizers feel pressure to hold candidates within their organizational pipeline even when another agency would serve that candidate better. The result: frustrated candidates, poor placements, and reputational damage that undermines long-term effectiveness.

The research makes clear that Gen Z, in particular, is acutely sensitive to this dynamic. A candidate who senses they are being recruited as a product rather than served as a person will disengage, and they will share that experience with their network.

What Kingdom-Minded Collaboration Looks Like

The research identified four primary circumstances warranting referral to another organization, and a clear set of practices that distinguish effective referrals from unhelpful generic redirections.

When to Refer

- **Doctrinal or theological misalignment:** Genuine differences in theological conviction between the candidate and the organization warrant honest naming and specific redirection to better-aligned agencies.

- Geographic focus or field access: When a candidate's geographic calling falls outside the organization's field presence, the candidate deserves an organization with depth in that context.
- Ministry approach differences: Church planting, development, medical, tent-making, pioneer, or established-church focus should match the candidate's vision, not just the organization's available positions.
- Specific skill requirements: Candidates with specialized professional skills (medical, engineering, education, etc.) deserve organizations with robust deployment infrastructure for those skills.

How to Refer Well

The most effective referrals follow five principles: (1) Lead with affirmation of calling, not rejection. (2) Be specific about why the fit is incomplete. (3) Offer a specific organization and contact, not just a category. (4) Complete the handoff actively through a personal introduction. (5) Maintain the relationship after the referral with a brief follow-up.

Why Kingdom Collaboration Ultimately Benefits the Referring Organization

The research identified five concrete mechanisms through which kingdom-minded referrals benefit the organizations that make them:

- Reputation for genuine care generates word-of-mouth referrals from candidates who experienced honest guidance, even without joining.
- Reciprocal referrals from peer mobilizers who recognize and respond to kingdom-minded behavior.
- Higher-quality applicants because organizations no longer invest in force-fit candidates who were never right for them.
- Return candidates whose circumstances change and who come back because they were treated with respect.
- Advocacy networks: missionaries serving elsewhere who were well-served in their discernment become supporters of the organization's reputation.

Building the Referral Network

Effective referral requires knowledge. Mobilizers who know peer organizations well enough to make specific, warm introductions (rather than generic redirections) are the product of intentional investment. This investment takes three forms:

- Informal mobilizer relationships built through conferences, shared events, and deliberate peer networking. The most valuable referrals come from personal trust relationships between individual mobilizers at different agencies.
- Formal collaboration networks such as sending collectives that enable structured partnership deployment for candidates who fit the organization's ethos but are called to contexts outside its field presence.

- Third-party connector organizations that serve as intermediary guides, helping candidates navigate the mission agency landscape. These reduce the friction of exploration for candidates earlier in their discernment process.

The Candidate Experience: What the Launch Survey Reveals

The 2025 Launch Survey asked missionaries about previous contact with staffers from organizations they did not ultimately join. Three findings stand out:

- The seed-planting effect: Conversations with other organizations' staffers shaped discernment in formative ways, even when the candidate didn't join that organization. "Each time I reached out to someone from a different organization, they planted a little seed in my heart."
- Direct placement impact: Multiple respondents described specific kingdom-minded referrals that led directly to finding their missionary home: "A staff member from another organization ultimately connected me with my current ministry when they heard about the skills I had."
- The lasting damage of gatekeeping: Negative encounters with organizations requiring complete specificity before entering into relationship left negative impressions that persisted for years.

Organizational Implementation Priorities

For organizations seeking to develop or strengthen kingdom-minded collaboration, the research points to three implementation priorities:

- Redesign metrics to celebrate kingdom wins alongside organizational ones. Leadership must explicitly recognize referrals that result in fruitful placements elsewhere as organizational successes, not failures.
- Train mobilizers in referral conversations. This is a distinct skill set requiring intentional development: language, specific contacts, and active handoff practices.
- Invest in peer mobilizer relationships through Missio Nexus gatherings and similar venues. Knowledge of peer organizations is the prerequisite for making specific, trustworthy referrals.

The Central Principle

The philosophy underlying all effective kingdom collaboration was articulated consistently across multiple interviews: "We're mobilizers, not recruiters. We help people discern what God is doing in their lives, even if that means they serve elsewhere."

Organizations that adopt this posture, and build the training, relationships, and metrics to support it, discover that genuine service to candidates is also the most effective long-term strategy for organizational health. Kingdom faithfulness and organizational

fruitfulness converge when the time horizon is extended beyond the next application cycle.

Full paper (8-10 pages) includes: detailed theological foundation, step-by-step referral conversation guidance, the three-pathway model, building referral networks, candidate survey data, organizational implementation framework, and 10 discussion questions for leadership teams.