

PEOPLES NEXT DOOR

STRATEGY OVERVIEW

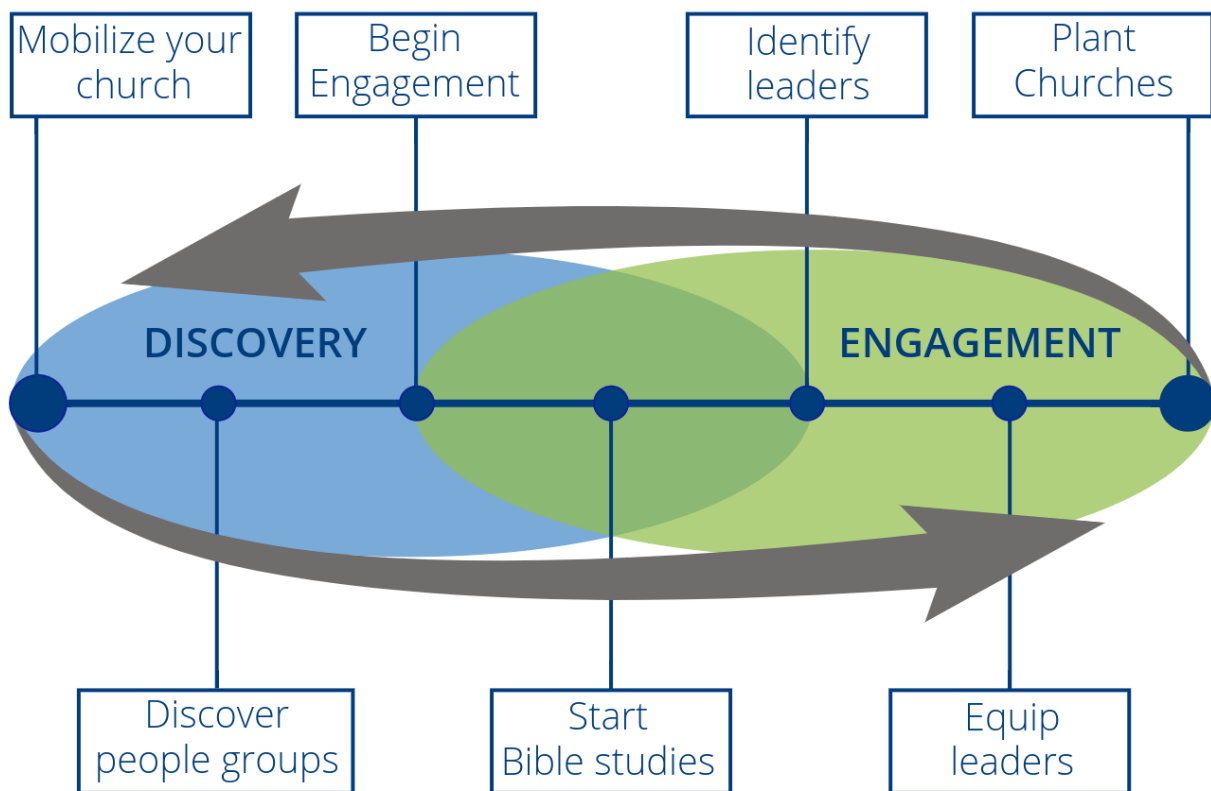
How to develop teams in your local church
for people group discovery and engagement



INTRODUCTION

In Acts 17, Paul reminds his listeners at the Areopagus that God determines the periods and boundaries of man, so that they can seek Him and perhaps find Him. God is doing something big, and he is doing it in your town, maybe even your neighborhood, right now. Over the course of 20-30 years, global migration patterns have increased to new highs. More people are moving from country to country than ever before, and many of those peoples are moving to North America. While doors into the hardest-to-reach nations are rapidly closing to missionaries, God is orchestrating a movement of these least reached peoples into the heartland of evangelical Christianity. The least-reached peoples are now in arms reach of your local church. So, the question is...what will you do about it?

The Peoples Next Door Project is an effort to equip local churches, associations, conventions, and others to discover and engage international people groups in North America. The following is a step-by-step strategy guide compiled from *The Peoples Next Door: A Primer for Reaching the Nations in Your Neighborhood*. The guide lays a foundation for this work in local churches. It is necessarily broad, and each church will want to apply these principles in their specific setting. However, by considering these broad steps, any church can begin the journey.



MOBILIZE YOUR CHURCH

Of course, the first step in any church-wide engagement strategy is mobilization. Any strategy to reach these people group pockets must be a local church driven effort. Sending agencies and seminaries play an important role in the training, equipping, and facilitating of the missionary task. Everyone in a local church can be part of the task of reaching these unreached peoples. Whole people group communities are forming in our cities and even our suburbs. Small groups, Sunday school classes, and even whole congregations can begin to discover and engage these people group communities, learn about them and their culture, and share the gospel with them through hospitality and proclamation. Developing a local church strategy for discovering and engaging people groups is not as hard as it sounds. If a church considers the basics, it can plot a way forward and build a localized strategy that considers the resources of its membership and location. A one-size-fits-all approach will not work, but crafting a local strategy starts by considering two things: the types of workers needed and the levels of involvement necessary for the church to succeed.

Three Levels of Mobilization

Just as there are three roles in the strategy, there are three levels of involvement to consider for crafting effective strategy: pastoral leadership, dedicated lay leadership, and every-member ministry. It goes without saying that pastoral support and involvement is paramount in any local church strategy. In order to create a local church strategy that has traction, pastors need to keep the vision for discovery and engagement in front of their congregation. This occurs through updates on the work, application points in sermons, and many other ways. A regular update on the work in member meetings showcases forward movement. The primary preaching pastor can seed regular application points into their sermons. Does the biblical text call for evangelism and outreach? If so, then specifically naming people group engagement as a practical application pushes the strategy forward. In fact, regularly seeding application points into sermons is more effective than periodically having a whole sermon on the issue.

While pastoral advocacy is important, the work will only get done if a team of dedicated lay leaders emerges. This team should be selected by pastoral leadership and granted the freedom to serve the church in this way. By broadcasting an initial vision for people group discovery and engagement, pastoral leadership can locate church members who are passionate about the cause and gifted to undertake it. It is important to celebrate the work of this team; however, the task is not limited to this team.

For this to be a church-wide strategy, everyone in the church must be challenged to participate on some level. If everyone is encouraged, the team of lay leaders will be replenished over time with new individuals who “dip their toe” into the waters of discovery and engagement. Furthermore, a strategy that calls everyone to action stretches church members to be a part of the mission of God in this way. While every member may not make this their primary means of service to the church, when all are called to be involved, they are sensitive to the work of others. They begin to look for small opportunities themselves, and some will take steps of obedience to be involved on a deeper level.



Three Roles for Members

The process of discovery and engagement can be boiled down to three distinct, but overlapping, roles: advocates, architects, and engagers.

Advocates are the mouthpiece of any movement. They cast vision for the work and rally people behind a cause. Advocacy is crucial to any to any sustained work in a local church. Key individuals must come behind a cause, give it a face in the congregation, and then provide its voice so that others understand its significance. Certainly, the pastor(s) of a church is the primary advocate in most congregations, but his voice must be met by others who see the need to be working with the peoples around them. These people may be small group leaders, Sunday school teachers, deacons, or key lay leaders in the church. In fact, the ideal advocate may be a passionate church member that is not currently dedicated to any of those tasks and has the freedom to dedicate time to the work of people group discovery and engagement.

Architects are the most specialized role. They focus on the details of discovery and engagement and synthesize the materials collected by all during discovery. Most local church strategies will only need a couple of architects; however, they are vitally important to the work. These people may need computer skills, be detail-oriented, and have a knack for working with the data collected. They will ultimately develop the church's "map" of their city and inform the engagement strategy moving forward. While this sounds like a daunting task, the learning curve is not what you may think. Plenty of resources now exist to help facilitate the architect's role.

Finally, the foundational role is that of an engager. **Engagers** are the boots on the ground. These people do the discovery, forge the relationships, and eventually work their way into people group communities. A church strategy is all talk, unless it has effective engagers. These people carry the regular responsibility of the strategy out of the church doors and into the neighborhoods. A church needs many engagers.

While each of these roles are essential to the overall success of the work, note that they do not have to be completely separate. Often, your best architect will be an engager and an advocate that is not an engager will be disingenuous. Overlap will, and should, occur between these roles as people fill multiple spots in the strategy.



DISCOVER PEOPLE GROUPS

Finding these new neighbors takes a process of intentional discovery. We need to find them, so that we can engage them, but we also need a way to understand them, so that we can proclaim the gospel to them in a way they will understand. If discovery is done well, it will lead to two significant outcomes. First, you will know where they are. By examining your area, you are likely to find the locations of people group communities and even develop a map of your neighborhoods or city. Second, you will know who they are. Discovery is more than finding out where people live. It is also how you begin to understand their culture, their religion, and their worldview.

Where are They?

This is done by exploring the city to identify and map out where people groups or affinities exist and how to strategically engage in church planting among them. In many ways, it is being a good listener; however, it is listening for the right things. There are three things that you should be listening for as you ask questions at ethnic establishments. First, where are they from? This will include country of origin and language spoken in the home. Second, where are they now? This answers questions like where they live, work, shop, play, and worship. Finally, are there any people of influence in the community? These people are gatekeepers to the community. If you know him (or her), he will be able to tell you everything about that community and most likely will invite you into the community. Points of interest serve as the basic building blocks of people group discovery.

Finding and documenting points of interest allows a local church, or group of churches, to develop maps and other tools for understanding and engaging their city. A point of interest is any establishment (restaurant, food market, fabric store, hair braiding salon, or apartment complex) that can be positively connected to a particular people group. These points serve as gateways into any people group community. This is where you will first identify a people group. When several points of interest for the same people group string together in the same geographic location, you may have found a people group community.

Who are They?

Discovery is about more than finding locations. For a local church to do faithful ministry among their new neighbors, it is essential to begin the work of cultural acquisition. Now, that is a big term, but it is a pretty simple concept. Cultural acquisition is simply approaching a specific group of people in a way that allows you to observe and learn their culture and worldview. It is easy to assume that we understand how someone thinks or believes by observing things on the surface. In order to communicate the gospel effectively to neighbors with a radically different culture, local churches must begin a process of discovery concerning that culture. While books or other sources may be helpful to an extent, real cultural acquisition is interpersonal and is done as the members of a church begin to ask the right questions and listen carefully for responses that showcase people's culture and beliefs.

Many church members do not feel they have the expertise, but this process is not hard. Good cultural acquisition is as simple as asking about the "Five Fs of Culture." These are food, family, festivals, finances, and faith. Coincidentally, these are the same kinds of questions asked of anyone as we begin a new relationship, so the conversations can be natural and provide the information necessary to develop culturally appropriate means of gospel proclamation.



BEGIN ENGAGEMENT

If local churches are involved from the beginning in people group discovery, the same conversations used to gather information are the first steps of engagement. Discovery naturally leads into engagement. This is why it is so important for people group engagement strategies to be local church driven from the beginning. Too often, churches fear they do not have the specialized skill set to identify people groups, so they wait for an association, convention, or the census bureau to gather the data for them. By doing this, churches have missed a key opportunity to begin engaging these people through the discovery process. If a church is simply handed a map of their area, are they any better off concerning engagement? I say no.

“Go and Tell” vs. “Come and See”

Remember that each of the people you meet in a point of interest belongs to a network of people, a social circle or people group community. The goal of your network of engagers is to meet their network. Instead of pulling an individual away from their community in order to bring them in contact with yours, take a group from your community and attempt to enter theirs.

Two terms come to mind when considering the type of engagement strategy necessary to effectively reach different types of people. The first, and most common approach, can be called a “come and see” approach. “Come and see” methods of engagement attempt to pull people into the church community in order to create confrontations with the gospel message. Most North American churches frequently use “come and see” methods.

Most often another approach better serves people from a far cultural setting or people antagonistic to a church setting. This second approach can be referred to as “go and tell.” Instead of bringing them to a church worship service or event, this method goes into their home and social circles and shares the gospel with them there.

Start Bible Studies

Instead of bringing them to a Bible study once a week done by your pastor, this approach facilitates a Bible study with them and their friends at an apartment complex. Meeting people group communities in their own setting provides a number of benefits and allows them to interact with the truths of the gospel without also having to interpret all of the cultural symbols that surround it in a Western church setting. This will eventually allow the gospel to take root in their culture, and they will start working out its truths in a way native to their people group community.

People group circles are made up of a whole spectrum of persons. These circles will have people who are very close to their cultural center and people who are further away from its center. Some will speak English, have lived in the States for a number of years, and understand American life much better than others. However, some may not know English at all, have recently moved to the States, and only know how to operate in their home culture. A “come and see” strategy cannot reach peoples who only know their home culture. Taking people from your network and attempting to gather a group for relationships and Bible study there has potential to reach even those who cannot speak English. By letting the gospel proclamation happen in their setting, it can take on their culture and language. This works to ensure that all of the people group community can be encountered.



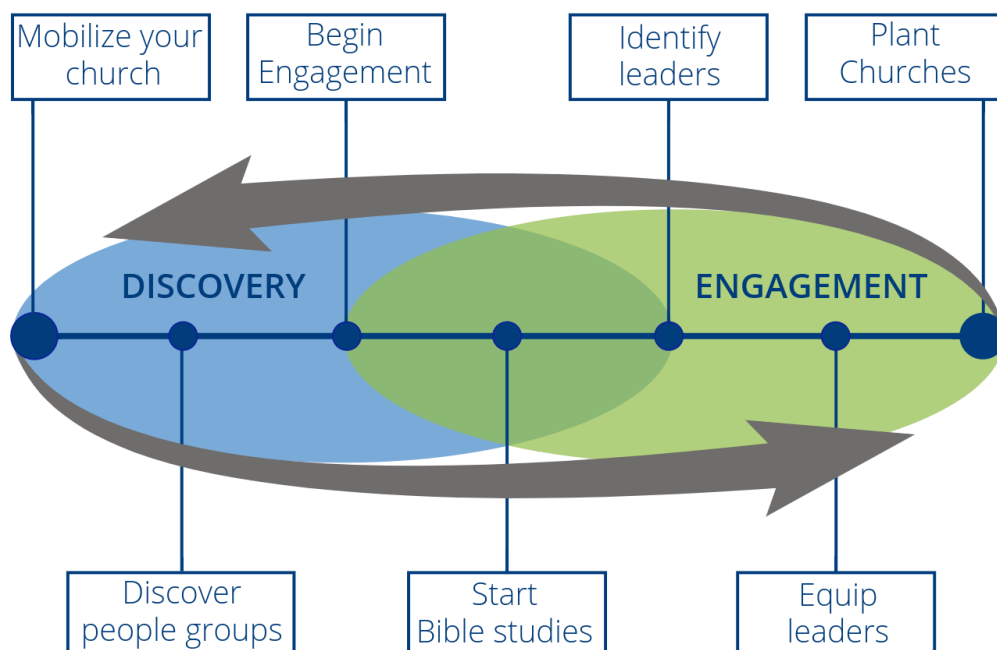
Identify and Equip Leaders

Starting Bible studies in the homes of your new neighbors has many advantages for mission, and one of those is the ability to identify and equip leaders. Our goal in any Great Commission ministry should be making disciples, and this work happens best when leadership development is a priority. If this new Bible study is to continue and reach other people, then it needs to be able to do so without your church's involvement. In many ways, good discovery and engagement will be working yourself out of a job! As the Bible study begins, your church will want to start assessing individuals for leadership. This, of course, assumes regenerate participants. As they become believers, and they grow in their understanding of the gospel, then some will exhibit the characteristics of leadership found in Scripture. Begin equipping these people to one day lead this group and work to start other studies. By equipping key leaders from within the culture, they will be better equipped to contextualize to the people group or social network you are attempting to reach.

PLANT CHURCHES

By now, you may be noticing a pattern. We are employing a “go and tell” approach. We are talking about reaching into their community instead of trying to drag them into our own. We are making key distinctions about meeting them in their culture and language as best we can, so that we are learning how to appropriate the gospel and equip them to worship in culturally sensitive ways. *The goal of this is not so that they become part of our church, but so that they can begin their own. Engagement is really about church planting.*

Planting churches allows for multiplication instead of addition. Where there were no churches, now there are two. Where there was one cultural presentation of the gospel in a community, there are now two. And as we continue to plant, and this new church picks up its responsibility to plant, that number continues to multiply. If all are faithful to such a task, then communities have a network of churches, all cooperating for the gospel in a diverse patchwork of cultures.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Peoples Next Door Website

The website (peoplesnextdoor.com) is the best way to stay updated on the progress of this project, including regular resources, articles, and content. It is updated regularly with 2-3 articles per week and serves as the online home for all Peoples Next Door resources.

Interactive Checklist for Discovery and Engagement

Here is a helpful checklist for those beginning the work of people group discovery and engagement. The checklist is an interactive outline, which means you can pull it up in any browser and work through the ideas step-by-step. The outline is a quick reference guide for developing forms for collecting data, a bank of potential questions to ask when doing people group discovery, and even a few quick thoughts on engagement.

PND: Fourfold Panoramic Assessment

How to carefully examine your local church in its mission context. Too often, people attempt to revitalize, plant, or replant a church without a full view of the landscape. Two big categories must be considered in local church assessment: the local church itself, and the context they are attempting to reach. However, even that is not enough. In order to see accurately, it must be done from more than one angle. The following resource provides a snapshot of the examination process for each perspective in the panorama.

