

Sadly we all know of horror mission stories: exciting teams that want to make a real difference, but end up building white elephants rather than what was needed; ill-equipped workers, who could have been much more effective if they had had adequate and appropriate training; the financial strain caused by an uninsured family member who ends up with a serious illness overseas; the long-term damage caused by culturally insensitive behaviour; the mission partner who has a breakdown, which could have been prevented by better member care. Yet many of these stories need never have happened.

Raising standards in mission

As a mission community, we need to reduce the number of horror stories by improving the way we do mission. Global Connections, the UK evangelical network of mission agencies, churches and colleges, has the aim of helping God's people (particularly those in the UK) be active and effective in global mission. So one of our core functions is giving priority to improving standards in mission.

A spectrum of options

There is no set formula for how to improve mission practice. The bottom line is that churches and agencies need a learning spirit, ready to learn from each other. If we think we have the best and only way, we are doomed to failure.

When we have such a spirit, the issue becomes which method or combination of methods to adopt in our own setting. Networks and national mission groupings such as ours can make available training for



Martin Lee is the
*Executive Director of
Global Connections, UK*



Vicky Calver
is the *Strategic
Development
manager of
global connections, uk*

staff and volunteers, produce proformas and sample documents, or look at ways to encourage peer review processes. However, maybe one of the key ways we can support is to develop guidelines or codes, which can be used internally by our member agencies and churches.

For this article we will concentrate on the production of codes and guidelines—two different models for encouraging good practice.

These two options vary in the level of flexibility they give to those who are applying the material to the activities of their particular agency or church. Codes are quite a formal process and usually include an adherence process or kite mark that ensures that the standard is maintained. Guidelines, on the other hand, are a set of recommendations that agencies should consider, a tool to help organisations think through areas they should look at in developing their own policies and procedures.

Starting with codes

For Global Connections, the journey of focusing on standards in mission began in the nineties with the development of a Code of Best Practice in Short-Term Mission - www.globalconnections.co.uk/thecode. This formed the basis of the development of documents to encourage high standards in short-term mission by other networks and alliances, such as the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada - <http://files.efc-canada.net/min/CodeBestPracticeSTMission.pdf> - and Standards of Excellence in Short-Term Mission committee in the USA - www.stmstandards.org.

V. Calver & M. Lee

The Canadian and UK codes are similar in style, with the code sub-divided into categories of activity, each with a list of statements outlining how this activity should be done well. The US Standards of Excellence are a list of seven principles, with three commitments per principle. However, with the updating of the UK code in 2005, principles were added to the code in order to reflect the distinctively Christian ethos and approach that forms the foundation of the document.

The method for developing the code of best practice in the UK and Canada was a consultative process involving practitioners and leaders within the sector. The UK code originally developed out of the Short-Term Mission Forum, a gathering of short-term mission coordinators within Christian organisations based in the UK but sending people overseas. In recent years, the forum has expanded to include those organising short-term mission programmes in churches and colleges as well as short-term programmes conducted in the UK.

The code was drafted by a group of people then reviewed by the broader forum. To improve practice, ensuing forum events focused on elements of the code with related training. In 2005, we felt it was time to update the code to make it more applicable to UK churches and to those doing short-term mission within the UK. As well as the traditional agencies sending teams overseas, the working group assigned to review the code included church leaders, mission committee members in churches and UK focussed

	Signed declaration	Signed declaration, annual reporting, required event attendance	Part monitored, self-evaluation process	Peer review process	Externally audited process
Requirements for organisations involved	Return a signed copy of either the code or code declaration form	Return a signed copy of either the code or code declaration form and attend the event	Complete self evaluation form, respond to questions by monitors, review monitor recommendations	Participate in peer review process, respond to recommendations, evaluate peer programmes	Produce documents for audit
Adherence level	Low -no proof of adherence	Low/medium - no proof of adherence except self declaration in annual report	Medium -organisational self reporting with external monitoring of forms	High - adherence demonstrated to and reviewed by peers	Very high - externally verified adherence to the Code
Organisations implementing this type of process	Christian Camping International (UK) Code of Practice ²	Evang. Fellowship of Canada, Code on Short Term Mission ³	Global Connections Code of Best Practice in Short Term Mission ⁴	Standards of excellence in Short Term Mission ⁵	People in Aid Code of Good Practice ⁶

mission organisations. Our experience demonstrates that a consultative process encourages the development of a sense of ownership of the code and a greater awareness of it within the mission community.

The aim of all these codes/standards was to promote a high level of achievement for organisations to aspire to. The USA Standards of Excellence also mentions the importance of strengthening effectiveness and adding credibility to existing programmes. However, the emphasis on standards falls short of a legal requirement.

“These Standards are not intended to establish legal regulations or liability, but rather to encourage the pursuit of excellence in all short-term mission efforts.”
http://www.stmstandards.org/about_intro.php

“The code is not intended to establish legal standards or liability”
<http://files.efc-canada.net/min/CodeBestPracticeSTMission.pdf>

Yet this very issue raises questions about the credibility of codes. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a code is “a systematic set of laws or rules¹.” The nature of a code suggests the need to demonstrate com-

pliance to the laws or rules in order to verify commitment to it. This dilemma has resulted in multiple solutions to the question of how we maintain the standard and so ensure the credibility of the code.

Maintaining the standard

Litigation does present challenges for those who develop codes as there are questions about how to maintain the integrity and value of the code, both to organisations that choose to adhere to it and in the perception of the general public. In addition, one needs to consider what liability the producers of the code undertake if an organisation that claims to adopt or adhere to the code acts in contradiction to the code. For networks like Global Connections, there is the additional question of the degree to which an informal network can “police” its own members.

This has led to a variety of code-monitoring approaches with varying levels of adherence and administrative cost built into the process. The following table outlines five possible methods along with the level of adher-

ence required for each and the organisations that currently implement these methods.

The benefit to organisations of going through some sort of monitoring process usually relates to the use of a specially designed logo in publicity materials. This logo is often viewed as a “kite mark” or “quality stamp” that shows the organisation has attained a certain standard. The difficulty comes

when the adherence process does not provide enough evidence to affirm a particular standard. This is why those going through the code monitoring process with Global Connections are recognised as “working towards the code of best practice” rather than being noted as achieving a set standard. The other benefit of such monitoring processes is that organisations are recognised as having adopted the code or completed the process on external websites or in directories.

The ultimate question for those developing codes and establishing adherence or adoption models is: what is the impact of the code on the standards of the organisations that complete the process—in other words, would the organisation have improved naturally without the code process being in place? This is hard to measure, but is an essential question to ask if we are to continue producing codes and maintaining the administrative processes to monitor or verify adherence to them.

1 The Oxford Popular English Dictionary, (1998, Parragon), p.140

2 www.cci.org.uk/members/code.php

3 <http://files.efc-canada.net/min/CodeBestPracticeSTMission.pdf>

4 www.globalconnections.co.uk/towardsCBP

5 www.stmstandards.org/adoption_provisional.php

6 www.peopleinaid.org/code/implementation.aspx

Moving to guidelines

If codes are labour intensive measures of standards, then guidelines are prompts to encourage better practice in mission. In Global Connections, we have sought a variety of approaches to seeing mission activity improve its quality. Recently, this has included developing guidelines in a variety of areas. Part of the reason for this is explained in the introduction to the Guidelines for Crisis Management and Prevention,

“It is impossible to provide “off the shelf” policies and procedures that fit all locations, circumstances and the needs of all groups. This set of guidelines has therefore been developed which are designed to help agencies and churches think through and develop their own agreed policies and procedures.”⁷

Like codes, the aim of guidelines is to improve practice, but it does this in a very different way. The flexibility that guidelines provide offers assistance to those that want to improve their practices, but does not include an element of incentive or monitoring to do so. One negative is that without an adherence process such guidelines can easily be forgotten or under-utilised. A positive is that their flexibility makes them more applicable to a wider audience, at least potentially. In addition, the lack of an adherence or monitoring process means that the time required to administer this can be utilised on producing other guidelines and linked resources instead.

The Global Connections Personnel/HR Forum brings together HR and Personnel staff from a variety of backgrounds. Initially, the forum looked at developing a code similar to the one for short-term mission mentioned above, but for long-term overseas missions. However, we soon realised that this was a step too far. The sector was too diverse for a code approach. What we needed was guidelines covering various areas, rather than a definitive code.

So far we have finalised two guidelines and a third is in its final draft. They are available from: www.globalconnections.co.uk/standards/

- Guidelines for Developing a Child Protection Policy
- Guidelines for Crisis Management and Prevention including Working in High Risk Areas
- Guidelines for Sending Staff or Volunteers Overseas in Relation to HIV

All are written in a similar style to the short-term mission code. They affirm what should be done without dictating how it should be done. Like the code, these guidelines developed out of a collaborative process within a particular forum (in this case Personnel/HR) and were approved by that forum. They were also developed in conjunction with other organisations and professional bodies that could provide expertise on particular issues or give the guidelines a wider audience because of their involvement.

This emphasis on flexible resource style documents is reflected in the recent development of “bolt-ons” to the code of best practice in short-term mission. Bolt-ons are supporting documents to be read alongside the code to help churches and organisations implement elements of the code. These have been very positively received as helping to make the code more practical. (See standards in mission practice section on our website.)

From adherence to recommendations

The interest in codes is often related to the need to demonstrate quality. Organisations are prepared to go through administrative processes if it helps in the marketing of their programme as a credible product. So a quality mark, kitemark or code brand can be important to the maintenance and development of a code. However, it is unclear whether monitoring processes bring real improvements in organisations or how significant and long-lasting any improvements are.

The issue of best practice over good practice has also been raised within the mission community. With post-modernity, there is uneasiness in certain cultures to affirm absolutes when the world is constantly changing. If changing circumstances mean that what constitutes best practice changes, then it can be suggested that the term is nonsensical because we can only know what is good at the moment rather than what is best over time. This has led some to only use the term “good practice.” This is not about semantics but the perception that we give to those who look to such standards to give guidance to the organisations they work for or volunteer with.

Guidelines, in contrast to codes, are more of a resource rather than a quality mark to be achieved. Their very flexibility means that they can easily be used in a variety of contexts. They present those who want to improve their practice with the tools to do so. However, they have no built-in incentive to affect change.

There are advantages and disadvantages to these approaches for improving standards. Some of the challenges are related to our own biases and understanding of the terms used, some are related to time, money, marketing and perception. From our experience, the key element in raising standards is our own attitude toward what we do and our willingness to learn from others—the desire to see our practice improve and the humility to learn from others.

Where to next?

Global Connections is still very much at the beginning of a journey. Different forums have identified a variety of ideas for more guidelines, bolt-ons and even codes. We are currently looking at developing a growing number of areas where we want to see standards improve, such as:

- Bolt-on pro-formas for application processes
- Guidelines for review/appraisal in an overseas context
- Good practice in international health and safety
- Good practice in member care
- Good practice in church and agency partnerships

Whatever we produce, however, needs to be based on developing a community that wants to learn. It is this commitment to learning that gives value to the process of developing such documents. It is the desire to improve that fuels the use of any codes and guidelines. Yet this desire alone does not reflect a distinctively Christian commitment to these values. This distinctive is reflected in stated principles and a clear emphasis on what motivates us to develop these types of materials.

Having explored the issues and challenges around raising standards in mission through codes and guidelines, we are reminded of what is written in the introduction of all such documents: **“Our motivation is based on our desire that God is glorified in all that we do.”** This statement is the bedrock of who we are and why we do what we do. Ultimately, the only reason why improving mission practice really matters is because we want to see God honoured. May God be glorified through what we do and may we see an end to the horror stories! <<

7. Page 2 of document downloadable from: www.globalconnections.co.uk/crisisguidelines