

How to Use the *MissionImpact Guide*

by Thomas Bandy

The *MissionImpact Guide* is intended to help local and regional church leaders apply the most recent lifestyle data from *Experian* to practical ministries and leadership training. In addition to *Experian* data, the recommendations here are also informed by *Quadrennium* research from *MissionInsite*; and almost 50 years of my personal experience as ordained clergy, national denominational program officer, and consultant and coach to churches and faith-based non-profits across all traditions, church sizes, and demographic contexts in the United States. It is also revised in response to ongoing conversations with national and regional church leaders.

Before You Begin

Upload the *PeoplePlot* for your congregation into your *MissionInsite* account. Include all *resident* members and *active* adherents. Do not include non-resident members or inactive adherents who are just on your mailing list.

Create a search area defining the current *Reach* of your church (the geographical area that includes at least 80-90% of households for resident church members and active adherents). Note: You can also define a search area for the current *Depth* of your church (the areas or neighborhoods where you have the highest concentration of church households and greatest influence).

Reality Test

Please remember that lifestyle research, and my recommendations, reveal *probabilities* and not certainties. Every household and every community are unique in their own way. Therefore, I urge you to always reality test these suggestions using your own volunteers. There are three helpful techniques:

1. Interview Teams:

Talk with leaders in local non-profit, social service, health care, and education sectors and emergency services. Also talk with municipal planners, real estate agents, retail developers and other agencies that influence the daily life of people in your community. Make appointments in advance. Show them the *ExecutiveInsite* report based on your own research, and the summaries from the *MissionImpact Guide* for the largest lifestyle segments represented in the community. Invite their comments and advice.

2. Targeted Prayer Walks:

Using your congregational *PeoplePlot* as a guide, select the neighborhoods or locations where you have the *fewest* member households. Use thematic mapping to identify the key lifestyle segments and study the segment summaries in the *MissionImpact Guide*. Walk the streets. Observe stores, homes and apartment buildings, signs, and images, and people passing by. Ask yourselves what people need, what seekers seek, and how your church can bless them. Share your insights with your clergy, church staff, and lay leaders to inform preaching and prayer, program development, and Sunday school and small group discussion.

3. Listening Prayer Triads:

Each team reviews the *MissionImpact Guide* summaries for lifestyle groups and segments in your area. Then linger in any place that the public may gather (like shopping malls, sports complexes, parks, and other public places) and simply observe the behavior patterns of people. Do not encroach on anyone's privacy. Just look and listen to what is going on around you. Each triad then debriefs about their perceptions, reflects on the diversity of ministry expectations in the community, and prays for strangers. Repeat this several times in different locations.

Analyze

Analysis and discussion of lifestyle diversity and expectations for church leadership and ministries is often done the clergy, church staff, and boards or councils. This is often part of an annual leadership retreat. It is usually included as part of a visioning process every few years (depending on the mobility of lifestyle segments in your church and community).

1. *ComparativeInsite* Report

Print and discuss a *ComparativeInsite* report that compares lifestyle representation in the search area to lifestyle representation in the church. (Focus particularly on pages 5-6 of the report). Pay attention to the top lifestyle representation in both community and church (usually the top 50-60%). Top segments in the community generally shape the culture of the search area (retail, housing, social services, health care, emergency services, entertainment venues, etc.) Top segments in the church generally shape the type and style of ministries (expectations for pastoral leadership, hospitality, worship, Christian education, small groups, outreach, facilities and technologies, stewardship and financial management, and communication).

Print and compare the relevant summaries for each lifestyle group and segment from the *MissionImpact Guide*. Compare and contrast attitudes toward spirituality and church participation, and expectations for leadership and ministry. Discuss what affirms or enhances your current strategy for ministry, and what surprises you and challenges your strategy for ministry. Discuss how to help influential lifestyle segments in the church manage the stress of adaptive ministry.

2. Reports for *MinistryInsite Priorities* and *ReligiousInsite Priorities*

Print these reports for the same search area. These reports include data collected by *Quadrennium* research. In the *MinistryInsite Priorities* report, review the commonly shared life concerns, program preferences, and reasons for non-participation in the church. In the *ReligiousInsite Priorities* report, review the commonly shared beliefs, social and moral values, and religious involvement of people in the area. Compare with the relevant summaries of lifestyle expectations for ministry in the *MissionImpact Guide*.

Compare current church strategies for leadership training and ministry to the needs of the search area. Discuss what affirms and enhances your current strategy for ministry. Discuss what surprises and challenges your current strategy for ministry. Discuss how stressful it might be for top lifestyle segments in the church to reach out and bless the top lifestyle segments in the search area.

Adapt

1. *MissionImpact Guide* Summaries

Print and share summaries of ministry expectations for the top lifestyle segments in the search area and church with the staff and committees responsible for specific ministries. These include leaders responsible for pastoral relations, hospitality, worship and music, Christian education, small and large groups, outreach and evangelism, property maintenance and facility upgrades, stewardship and fund raising, and communications and social media.

Ask each staff leader or committee to recommend ways to train volunteers, customize programs, and adapt resources to bless lifestyle segments under-represented in the church. Ask these leaders to develop a plan to anticipate the stress of change and communicate the missional reasons for change.

2. Congregational Worship and Prayer

Locate the images describing the top lifestyle segments in the search area and church in the *MissionImpact Guide* and the *Experian e-Handbook*. Take screen shots of the images and transfer them to PowerPoint slides. Show them in worship and briefly describe their attitudes and needs. Pray that God will bless them and guide the church to find ways to meet their needs and include them in ministries.

You can find additional information about ministry applications of demographic research amid lifestyle diversity in my books (all from Abingdon Press and available on www.Amazon.com).

- ✓ *See Know and Serve the People within Your Reach*
- ✓ *Worship Ways for the People within Your Reach*
- ✓ *Strategic Thinking: How to Sustain Effective Ministry*
- ✓ *Spiritual Leadership: Why Leaders Lead and Who Seekers Follow*
- ✓ *Sideline Church: Bridging the Chasm between Churches and Cultures*