

Guidelines for Benevolence

Clearly defined guidelines will help a church know when to spend a significant amount of time and energy with a need and when to refer an individual/family to another community organization. Guidelines also help a church determine priorities for the available resources.

Determine the values that guide your benevolence ministry.

1. Partner with people, not problems. Building relationships and creating partnerships leads to transformation and growth for both the individual and the congregation.
2. Listen with the goal of understanding. Being compassionate helps us understand what life might be like for another and can help us discover underlying reasons for a person's immediate situation.
3. Affirm the dignity of all persons. This requires recognizing middle-class biases and life assumptions.
4. Respect personal information and treat as confidential the information individuals share.

Focus your benevolence ministry.

1. Who will we help? How will we prioritize those seeking assistance (neighbors of the church, church members, referrals from community agencies, particular life needs)?
2. Do we have a special opportunity with a specific target group?
3. Do we want to set geographic boundaries for assistance? Since many churches are in neighborhoods without significant immediate needs for emergency relief, consider partnering with the materially poor beyond the local church neighborhood.

Prioritize your resources.

1. What percentage of the benevolence budget will be used for emergency relief and what percentage will be used for individual betterment?
2. What boundaries will we set (we will always help with . . . or we will never help with . . .)?
3. Are there any types of assistance we will not provide?
4. How often will we help an individual/family?
5. How will we respond to persons who are capable of working but unwilling to work full-time?

Determine your process.

1. Will we require an intake form to be completed in order to receive assistance? Consider developing an intake and record keeping form to follow assistance and individual progress toward goals, if any are set.
2. What sort of fact-checking will we do?
3. When and how will we partner with other community ministries or agencies?
4. When will we require/partner with an individual/family to develop an action plan? An action plan is a tool designed to help recipients of benevolence focus on specific goals they can accomplish to improve their situation and work with an accountability partner to encourage growth in particular areas. An action plan could include setting goals for counseling, financial management training, job readiness classes, ESL or GED classes or other related growth opportunities as well as determining specific actions the individual will take in a designated time frame.

An excellent resource for use in developing benevolence ministry is [Helping Without Hurting in Church Benevolence](#) by Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert.