



# Mission Trips in Mexico: The Ethics of Foreign Aid

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## Introduction + Methods

Our research focused on key features of successful foreign aid models and compared them to those of current mission trips to Mexico. We also explored the effects of current mission trips on local communities. This research pointed to the reality that the Mexico-based mission trips this study examined are often harmful to local communities. Mission trips reinforce the White Savior Complex and take away the autonomy of local Mexican communities.

## Research Question

**Do mission trips in Mexico effectively help local communities and provide ethical foreign aid?**

## Strong Foreign Aid Models

Community input, tailoring an aid experience to be individualized to specific communities, and having a clear exit strategy are three key pillars in a strong model.

**Community input** involves collaboration with local communities about specific areas they need help in as well as regular feedback on existing programs.

A **clear exit strategy** means having a plan for how the program is going to shift the responsibility of any new systems over to the local community to prevent cycles of dependence.

## Harmful Effects

Mission trips can turn into volunteer tourism rather than productive foreign aid. Anderson's 2019 study found **82% of funds raised go to travel costs, only 18% go to the recipient community**. Mission trips do not create effective systems or long-term solutions to problems. There is a lack of education about the people and needs of the community and overall disempowerment of locals. Mission trips reinforce the White Savior Complex

## Improving the Mission-Trip Model

A **shift in mindset** away from prioritizing White Saviorism and volunteer experience, *towards* long-term community benefit is an essential first step. Make sure that beneficiaries and volunteer coordinator have built **trust and collaboration** through frequent communication and open dialogue. It is important to recognize when it is more suitable to **redirect program funds** away from volunteer travel towards support in obtaining key resources.

Appropriate pre- and during travel **education** on culture and intercultural dynamics is valuable to improve awareness of and thus mediating actions towards negative systems like the white-savior complex.

## Significance

Mission trips in Mexico are disempowering and detrimental to communities. Improving the existing approach to mission trips can support communities in need while effectively combatting and dismantling White Saviorism; the mindset that a white person helps someone who is non-White in a self-serving manner. It is essential to redefine mission trips to provide productive foreign aid, incorporate local communities in a dignified way and end the White Savior mindset.

## References

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