

# Drowning in Paperwork

Some people say announcements will kill you. That may be true for the people in the seats. But for the people in leadership like us, it's all that blasted paperwork. Forms, budgets, signatures...ahhhh!!!!

They didn't mention that in the youth ministry brochure!

But it's part of the deal anyway. So, as you get ready to take your youth on a great summer mission trip—or any other important youth trip—here are a few tips to lighten your load and make sure the paperwork is done right the first time...so you can get on with the business of caring for those teenagers.

- 1. Take time to get it right.** If the organization that needs your forms will be scanning them, they could require blue or black ink, writing in all caps within the boxes, or filling in the circles completely. Spend a few moments before you hand them out so kids and parents know what's required. Remind them. And give them the right color pen. Most organizations require the original forms with original signatures—not faxes or photocopies.
- 2. Know the due dates...then back-track two weeks.** There are good reasons why organizations need your paperwork by a particular time. If you fail to do that, you might not be able to participate. Try telling THAT to your kids and parents: “Um, we can't go because I didn't send our stuff in on time.” So play it safe. Whatever date the forms are due to the organization, require your young people to give them to YOU two weeks before. That allows a little grace period for that one family that ALWAYS misses the deadline. It also gives you a last chance to look through them to make sure everyone filled out all the required places and signed in all the right places.
- 3. Remember privacy laws regarding medical information.** HIPPA laws require health and medical information to be kept locked up and viewed only by those who need to know it. While it's important for you and other adult leaders to know one of your students has a certain medical condition, it's not allowed for you to share that with any of the students or other parents—even as a prayer request. Under the Health Information Privacy Portability Act (HIPPA), you can be sued for sharing such information with the wrong people. And this HAS happened in churches before. Shred these forms when you're finished with them.
- 4. Have a forms and information night...that everyone must attend.** If you're going on a mission trip or other major excursion, you'll likely need to distribute and collect a small forest of paperwork. If so, announce several months in advance—so everyone can get it on the calendar—the date of the required “Parents and Youth” night to talk about the trip. Announce this several times so it sinks in. Tell people to bring their insurance cards, birth certificates,

passports...or whatever it is you have to have. As people arrive, hand them the paperwork to fill it out right there. If forms need to be notarized, have a notary available. Have another adult collect the paperwork and double-check that everything is filled out properly and all the signatures are included. If something's missing, hand it back to the person to make the corrections. You should also talk about other important aspects of the trip while you have everyone there. Have this well in advance of when the forms are all due...because I guarantee a youth won't show up, or a parent won't show up ("I didn't hear about this!"), or things will happen.

- 5. Make copies for your own records.** Before you send everything off in the mail (so it arrives on time), make a copy for your own records. You might need to know the information during the trip, or you might need to have a back-up in case it gets lost in the mail or something. I always kept all these forms in an accordion file that I could take with me on the trip. I had everything I needed from forms to vendor agreements to hotel reservations to everyone's T-shirt size. If we needed it, I had it. Right then. Right there. You'd be amazed how much easier this makes your life.

I know the paperwork and forms management is a big pain. None of us likes to do it. But you can save yourself a lot of embarrassment and hassle by taking the extra time to get it right.

And when you DO manage this part of your ministry well, you'll communicate a great deal of competence and credibility to your church and the parents. You're saying how much you care about their kids.

God Bless,

*Your friends at Group Workcamps Foundation*

