

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE U.S. STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE IN SHORT-TERM MISSION

The sense for the need of a short-term mission “code” or “standards of best practice” existed in the hearts and minds of several people for many years prior to what became the official **U.S. Standards of Excellence in Short-Term Mission (STM)**.

During the 1990s, certain mission leaders began their own in-house versions of “standards” for STM. During this same period of time there were unrelated spontaneous “hallway discussions” at the National Short-Term Missions (NSTMC) and Fellowship of Short-Term Mission Leaders (FSTML) conferences about the need for “codes” or “standards” for STM groups. One of the earlier pioneers, Seth Barnes (Adventures in Missions), drafted a set of 11 “standards” for STM projects in the early 1990s. Then in January 1995, Seth Barnes, Art Greenleaf (CBInternational / DELTA Ministries), and Paul Borthwick (Grace Chapel Missions Pastor / Author) met to discuss what a process might look like for drafting standards that all STM practitioners could adopt. In November 1995 they assembled a roundtable of mission executives at Simpsonwood Conference Center near Atlanta - moderated by FSTML Chairman Dennis Massaro (Wheaton College). Also present were Daryl Nuss (Campus Crusade for Christ and NNYM), Roger Peterson (STEM Int'l), Dave Bidwell (Youth for Christ), and several other men and women involved in STM. Up to this point, no process or legal sanction for a set of “standards” had come forth.

The U.S. Standards of Excellence in Short-Term Mission finally began taking shape in 1999, thanks to colleagues in Canada who were developing the Canadian Code of Best Practice for Short-Term Mission (which they themselves based on the U.K. Global Connections Code of Best Practice in Short-Term Mission). Laura Dill Warner (Perimeter Church, Atlanta and an AESTM board member), attended part of the Canadian process. During the next year she began discussions with colleagues within the broader STM network - especially the FSTML conference network - to see whether something like this might be possible in the U.S.

During a January planning meeting for the 2001 FSTML conference, the FSTML Steering Committee sensed God was directing them to facilitate the process of gathering nationwide input into the development of such a set of standards. God clearly instructed the group that FSTML was not to determine what those standards should be - but rather to be the facilitator, the central “hub” to collect as much input from as many STM practitioners as possible.

From October 2001 to September 2002, FSTML collected initial input from five separate mission networks around the U.S. (Colorado Springs, Minneapolis, Atlanta (twice), and Phoenix). They received feedback from STM leaders, agencies, churches, host receivers, etc. Those thousands of input items were summarized into 14 paragraphs, grouped together by similar content. This became Standards Draft #1. During October 2002, attendees at the FSTML conference in Atlanta reviewed Draft #1 and created six versions of Draft #2. Those six versions of Draft #2 went to an ad hoc committee (nine conference attendees) who met in Chicago for two days in December 2002.

AD HOC COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

<p>David Armstrong Mission Data International / ShortTermMissions.com Siloam Springs AR</p> <p>Daryl Nuss National Network of Youth Ministries (NNYM) San Diego CA</p> <p>Seth Barnes Adventures in Mission Atlanta GA</p>	<p>Laura Dill Warner Perimeter Church / FSTML / AESTM Atlanta GA</p> <p>Roger Peterson STEM Int'l / FSTML / AESTM Minneapolis MN</p> <p>Jenny Collins Taylor University Upland IN</p>	<p>Barb Dewald Northwestern College Orange City IA</p> <p>Brian Heerwagen DELTA Ministries Portland OR</p> <p>Stephanie Wilcox Woodman Valley Chapel Colorado Springs CO</p>
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The committee synthesized the six versions of Draft #2 into Draft #3, which became the prototype of the **Seven U.S. Standards of Excellence in Short-Term Mission**. Two committee members wrote the initial explanations for each of the Seven Standards; four others took on the task of making recommendations for member adoption levels.

In January 2003, approximately half of the attendees at the San Diego Mission Affinity Network Summit of the National Network of Youth Ministries (NNYM) met to begin the critiquing process of the Seven Standards. (Even prior to this meeting, several NNYM-related people had also determined the need for NNYM to help establish standards for STM.) Some of these San Diego attendees, along with the Chicago ad hoc committee, agreed to continue their service on the official Standards Steering Committee (volunteers reporting to the Alliance for Excellence in Short-Term Mission (AESTM) Board). Finally, in October 2003 at the FSTML conference in Atlanta, the **U.S. Standards of Excellence in Short-Term Mission** was formally launched; churches, mission agencies, and schools began the official adoption process.

In summary, the resulting standards were developed over three years by God's grace with input from more than 400 STM leaders across the U.S. and were a product of thousands of hours of work, discussion, and prayer. As a result, now your organization has the opportunity to adopt the Standards along with many others!