MAKING CONNECTIONS

Serving Young Adult Christian Scientists

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Young Adult Research Consultant | Adventure Unlimited
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• David Crabill
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• Savanna Sprague
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Adventure Unlimited embarked on a year-long research project to answer the question: how can the organization support young adults (ages 18-35) who have a connection to Christian Science? Through interviews, focus groups, surveys and initial testing of ideas, we explored a variety of topics related to this question that shed light on how young adults want to interact with one another and ultimately will help to inform the role Adventure Unlimited might take in supporting this interaction. These topics included:

- Programs, activities, and/or resources young adults find value in, contribute to their spiritual growth, and encourage them to stay connected with Christian Science community.
- The role an organization plays in serving young adults.
- How organizations should communicate with young adults, and how young adults want to communicate and interact with each other.
- Reasons young adults disengage with or are deterred from participating in a Christian Science community.

While data from the surveys provide useful insights into these topics being explored in this research, they may not be representative of the larger population of young adults who have a connection to Christian Science. This is partly due the fact that the response rate was not high enough to be confident the survey results would be relatively the same every time the survey was conducted.

In order to learn from Adventure Unlimited’s broad set of stakeholders, as well as individuals beyond the organization’s circle, we connected with a diverse group of young adults including individuals who attend church, don’t attend church, consider themselves Christian Scientists, or don’t consider themselves Christian Scientists. We asked research participants to self-identify as either actively engaged in the Christian Science community (which we refer to as invested in the Christian Science community) or as uncertain or no longer engaged with the Christian Science community (which we refer to as divested from the Christian Science community). This represented a varied demographic, including young adults who consider themselves divested (because they don’t actively engage with church) but still consider themselves Christian Scientists.¹

Research revealed there is considerable interest among young adult Christian Scientists to stay connected and engaged with each other on a more regular basis. Young adults value the relationships they have developed through experiences at camps for Christian Scientists, DiscoveryBound, Principia, etc. as well as opportunities to engage with these peers as young adults. Many of them see other young adult Christian Scientists as spiritual resources with whom they can ask questions, work through challenges, and make a larger impact on the community.

Overall, the majority of research participants shared that they would most like to engage with other young adult Christian Scientists in local social activities. Social activities offer fellowship with individuals who share commonality in background, values, and outlook on life. Additionally though, survey respondents conveyed that shared social experiences with spiritually like-minded individuals had considerably contributed to their spiritual growth in the past. This is most likely due to the fact that social activities help build relationships and make people feel comfortable talking with others about spirituality.

Furthermore, a significant number of focus group participants also expressed interest in activities that have greater spiritual substance (e.g. topical discussions, bible study, etc.) and community service. These provide an outlet for

¹ See Appendix 1.2 for more information on demographic subsets.
young adults to delve deeper into spirituality and Christian Science with spiritually like-minded peers. Young adults want a non-judgmental space where they are given the opportunity to genuinely explore. This highlights the need to experiment with a variety of activities, some social and some spiritual, which tailor to a diverse mix of interests and desires.

As a result, it’s recommended that Adventure Unlimited should prioritize supporting peer-led activity on the local level. Research participants made clear that, ultimately, local activity must be community-led. Community leadership and consistent engagement are important ingredients for building a community that feels personal and meaningful. When local leaders spearhead activity, it feels more authentic and organic. However, research also revealed that organizations play an important role in helping stimulate local engagement.

Organizations have resources and networks that may be useful for helping young adults connect and interact with each other. The following resources and strategies were identified to encourage local activity:

- Have a paid staff member who is able to devote time to working with young adults and helping plan activities.
- Identify young adults who are interested in helping organize local activity and help them network with others.
- Host groups of young adults for a meal to give them the opportunity to talk about what they want to create as a community and how an organization might provide support.
- Plan occasional local DiscoveryBound activities to provide a space for young adults to connect and encourage them to continue interacting.
- Set up an online platform that provides an outlet for communication and a calendar of activities.
- Set up a fund where young adults can apply for money to subsidize more expensive activities.

Moreover, research participants also indicated interest in activities of longer duration. Survey respondents were asked to pick up to five activities that they would be most interested in participating in with other young adult Christian Scientists. Four of the top five were weekend activities (adventure trip, weekend vacation, weekend at camp, and weekend spiritual summit). This suggests that Adventure Unlimited should continue to support regional and national events for young adults or experiment with longer activities on the local level.

Research participants indicated an activity’s atmosphere is a very important consideration for them when deciding to attend an activity. Young adults want engagement to feel personal, meaningful, and like a natural fellowship between friends (descriptions that are often used to describe what an “organic” activity looks and feels like). Many focus group attendees felt that “organized” activity sometimes feels “forced” or “insincere.” They acknowledged that it is challenging to get to a point where participants experience a feeling of authenticity and genuine connection with others because it requires time, effort, and regularity of engagement from individuals in the community. Activities of longer duration (such as national weekend activities) were thought to foster intimacy more easily than shorter local activities. But Adventure Unlimited and communities will have to continue to experiment with ways to overcome the barrier of limited time and the stigmas of “organized” activity at the local level.

Additionally, this demographic expressed keen sensitivity to feelings of judgment within a Christian Science community. Focus groups revealed young adults are diverse in terms of their experiences and thoughts about how lifestyle decisions relate to being a Christian Scientist. Examples of these decisions include living with a significant other before marriage, drinking beer or wine, or being gay. Some perceive organizations expressing opinions about

2 See Appendix 2.2 for more about what “organic activity” means.
what is right and wrong and this, among other things, creates distrust toward organizations. This is another reason why young adults have expressed reluctance to participate in “organized” activity.

Young adults who have divested from the Christian Science movement shared a variety of reasons why they don’t engage with Christian Science community. Some don’t agree with the foundational premises taught in Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures while others are turned off by the social or cultural norms that they see expressed in some communities. Additionally, some young adults don’t feel a connection with church. Many of these individuals shared an appreciation for their upbringing in Christian Science, and even though they might not currently practice Christian Science, attribute things such as their close friendships from a Christian Science camp or Principia, a loving standard for living life and interacting with others, an appreciation for the power of thought, and an inquisitiveness toward spirituality.

Some of these individuals conveyed interest in group activities with other Christian Scientists or friends from past experiences at camp or Principia. For those who don’t consider themselves Christian Scientists, however, it has to be an activity that aligns with their goals and an environment where it feels comfortable not to be a Christian Scientist. These individuals expressed greater interest in outdoor adventure, community service, social or environmental justice engagement, or interfaith activity. For most of them the value in group activity is more about fellowship, service to community, or nonsecular spiritual exploration than it is about Christian Science.

All in all, conducting this research showed that engagement by Adventure Unlimited encourages and empowers peer-led activity; focus groups ignited interest among many young adults to interact with one another on a more regular basis. Going forward, Adventure Unlimited will have to continue to test the results and recommendations from this study to see if the findings successfully guide the development of greater connection and engagement among young adults as well as contribute to spiritual growth. Adjustments will certainly have to be made, but the foundation for serving young adults in this report will likely lead to more activity. There are already examples of groups in Boston, Denver-Boulder, and Austin that are actively putting together activities with regular interest. After all, 83% of survey respondents who indicated they were invested, as well as a few individuals who indicated they were divested, said that they would like to attend group activities for young adult Christian Scientists. And 68% percent of all respondents said that they would like to attend group activities for young adult Christian Scientists.

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3 See Constructive Criticism of Christian Science Communities.
4 Ibid.
RESULTS

The Vital Role of Connection

The vital role that connection and community plays for young adult Christian Scientists was a key theme that ran through much of this research. Young adult Christian Scientists in this study overwhelmingly indicated a desire to build connections and community with their Christian Science peers as well as engage in opportunities that develop a sense of fellowship, open pathways for spiritual growth, and express the spirit of church.

Through focus groups and online surveys, research participants that consider themselves Christian Scientists indicated that spiritually like-minded social community and opportunities for spiritual exploration and/or study are important to them. Overall, respondents to the survey ranked outdoor adventure, like-minded social community, and opportunities for spiritual exploration and/or study as the top three things they are most looking for in life (compared to church community, spiritual community, engagement with community service, engagement with social and/or environmental justice issues, and career networking and/or professional development).

Please pick up to three of the following that you are looking for most in your life? (Select all that apply)

\[ n = 214 \quad \text{skipped} = 0 \]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>I don't consider myself a practicing Christian Scientist</th>
<th>I consider myself a practicing Christian Scientist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3%</td>
<td>Church community</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13%</td>
<td>Spiritual community</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25%</td>
<td>Like-minded social community</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31%</td>
<td>Opportunities for spiritual exploration and/or study</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41%</td>
<td>Outdoor adventure</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49%</td>
<td>Engagement with community service</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72%</td>
<td>Engagement with social and/or environmental justice</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3%</td>
<td>Career networking and/or professional development</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5 Refer to Appendix 1.1 for information about how the data was collected and how the survey results were organized and interpreted. While data from the surveys provide useful insights into the topics explored in this research, they may not be representative of the larger population of young adults who have a connection to Christian Science.

6 Both respondents who considered and didn’t consider themselves Christian Scientists indicated that outdoor adventure is what they are most looking for in their life. However, a significantly higher percentage of respondents who didn’t consider themselves Christian Scientists (72%) indicated that they would be most interested in outdoor adventure compared to respondents who considered themselves Christian Scientists (49%). This suggests that divested individuals who didn’t consider themselves Christian Scientists might be more likely to attend an outdoor adventure activity as opposed to other activities that Adventure Unlimited might support (see Appendix 3.2).

7 This question did not specifically ask about interest in spiritually like-minded social community. However, focus groups revealed that young adult Christian Scientists want greater interaction with spiritually like-minded communities of other young adults.

8 Separating respondents based on marital status and whether or not they have children revealed some significant differences in what young adults are looking for most in their life. See Appendix 1.2 for more info on the differences.
Similarly, when focus group participants were asked if there was anything they are looking for more of in their life, individuals often responded they were looking for more interaction with peers within the Christian Science community.

“I have been craving something like this to connect with other Christian Scientists my age.”

“No matter how invested you are [in Christian Science], it’s kind of nice to be surrounded by people who have the same base, and that same foundation. And to feel at home with those people.”

These findings suggest young adult Christian Scientists are interested in developing greater connections with each other. The reasons why this interest exists, however, are varied.

Why an Interest in Greater Connections Exists

Focus group participants shared the predominant reasons why they have a desire for greater connection with other young adult Christian Scientists. These include:

• Valuing friendships with other “like-minded” individuals who have similar backgrounds as Christian Scientists.

• Using other young adult Christian Scientists as spiritual resources (e.g. a person to ask questions to and rely on for support).

• Helping strengthen commitment to and/or practice of Christian Science.

• Being in an environment free from pressures of alcohol, tobacco, and/or drugs.

• Developing valuable networks for career, professional development, and other opportunities.⁹

While many focus group participants expressed appreciation for the comforting fellowship with other spiritually like-minded individuals, young adults also shared that connections with other Christian Scientists contribute to their spiritual growth. Notably, these connections are a resource for young adults to work through various challenges, including navigating their career, relationships, social drinking culture, having kids, etc.

“It’s hard to be a Christian Scientist and it’s always been hard. But for me it’s been exhausting to be so exposed to the outside world and not have Principia or camp to rely on…. If I had a community of young people to talk to, it would be very helpful for me. I think that the people that I need most are young Christian Scientists. It’s hard for me not to have talked to someone who has been in the real world and dealt with those kinds of issues and how it

⁹ In the final survey, respondents who said it was important to them that their spiritual community is with other Christian Scientists strongly identified with the statements, “I value the friendships I made through church and/or other experiences with Christian Scientists around my age,” “I enjoy being in an environment free from alcohol, tobacco, and/or drugs,” and “Other young adult Christian Scientists can be a spiritual resource for me” (See Appendix 3.2).
intersects with my faith. Those people are hard for me to find outside of Principia and camp. How else am I supposed to meet them outside of those organizations?”

“It’s important to feel that there are others out there that are working through the same challenges. It would be great to have that support community.”

**Experiences that Contribute to Spiritual Growth**

To delve deeper into what contributes to a young adult Christian Scientist’s spiritual development, we asked focus group participants how an organization like Adventure Unlimited could nurture their spiritual growth. While most acknowledged that spiritual growth is an individual pursuit (one individual shared, “for me my spiritual growth has to do with me making time in my day for God”)

10, many research participants indicated experiences that nurture spiritual learning:

- Church and/or participation in branch church committees.
- Shared social experiences with spiritually like-minded individuals.
- Activity with a spiritual mission or purpose such as a Bible study or topical spiritual discussions.
- Community service or engagement with social or environmental justice issues.

The majority of survey respondents that consider themselves Christian Scientists felt that all of the experiences listed above at least somewhat contributed (at some point in the past) to their spiritual growth. 58% of respondents said that individual conversation with friends about spirituality significantly contributed to their spiritual growth. Overall, however, participants said that church and/or participation in local church committees and shared social experiences with spiritually like-minded individuals also moderately or significantly contributed. While spiritually-focused activity (e.g. bible study, discussions, online forums), mission-driven activity (e.g. community service, social/environmental justice engagement), and a spiritual retreat still contributed, they did not contribute as much for a majority of respondents.11

10 Many young adults in focus groups shared that online resources provided by Christian Science Publishing Society such as GoVerse, the Daily Lift, and JSH Online as well as other resources such as Cedars Camps’ weekly metaphysical have been valuable resources for individual study.

11 This may be due to a lack of data. A significant enough percentage of respondents selected “N/A” when asked if mission-driven activity, spiritually-focused activity, or a spiritual retreat contributed to their spiritual growth. This indicates that many respondents likely had not had a previous experience with these activities. As a result, the responses to these questions don’t as accurately tell whether young adults feel that mission- or spiritual-driven activity or a spiritual summit contribute to their spiritual growth.
To what extent have the following experiences contributed to your spiritual growth?

\[ n = 182 \quad \text{skipped} = 0 \]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Did't Contribute</th>
<th>Contributed Little</th>
<th>Somewhat Contributed</th>
<th>Moderately Contributed</th>
<th>Significantly Contributed</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual conversation with friends about spirituality</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared social experiences with spiritually like-minded people</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church and/or participating in local church committees</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritually-focused group activity (e.g., bible study, discussions, online forums)</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual retreat</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission-driven activity (e.g., community service, social/environmental justice engagement)</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>18%</td>
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</table>

Many participants shared they are looking to develop relationships with others where they feel comfortable delving into topics of spirituality and religion. They noted that spaces for this type of conversation don’t readily exist for young adults and many miss the experiences that provided an outlet for discussion when they were younger such as at camps for Christian Scientists, Principia, or during a DiscoveryBound or TMC Youth activity.

“I’m looking for someone I can ask deeper questions to or have that discussion with where I feel like I have grown from it. I love talking about things with people but it’s hard to go past superficial and that’s something I always got at camp… I’ve struggled to get to that next level where they can be a support system or some sort of confidant for you.”

“Having those conversations can be so full in someone’s experience because if we sugarcoat things, the questions that young adults might have won’t be answered and that connection between their lives and God through Christian Science can get lost just because those answers are not there… I feel like having those difficult conversations and being so honest with our purpose, who we are, our experience and just finding the ‘why’ of everything.”

Similarly, multiple participants conveyed how addressing challenges is important for their spiritual development. Young adults experience a number of challenges that are unique to this point in life, and it is helpful to have others to talk to about these challenges.
“For me it’s actually acknowledging the difficulties and challenges of being a Christian Scientist in our age and in this world. Like being really truly honest with each age group... As a mom, it’s so great to hear the success stories, but it’s equally important to hear about the challenges and be real about it. I think the more we hear about those things and discuss them, the less judgment there will be.”

“We’re not talking about challenges that we have. And it’s good with all the progress and demonstrations, but to talk about the challenges we’re going through now is a really important part of supporting each other. I don’t see that a whole lot.”

Some individuals didn’t express interest in group activities for young adult Christian Scientists outside of church. They see church as the focal point for fellowship, spiritual growth, and making an impact on the larger community.

“I’d actually like to connect [with young adult Christian Scientists] over church work. I know a lot of people connect over sports and I’m not really a sports guy. I think getting together to promote Christian Science for a group like putting together a lecture or doing something that would promote our shared interest which is Christian Science. I’m a little weary of going to a place and doing an activity only because we’re Christian Scientists. To me that’s not enough of a reason. The reason to me would be to promote [Christian Science] or in some fashion work together and apply it.”

Focus group participants shared various ideas about initiatives that could be organized around church. Some of the ideas include:

• More fellowship events in order to build deeper relationships with the church community.

• Increased collaboration between local churches to foster fellowship with the greater Christian Science community, which might include hosting joint lectures or fellowship events.

• Hosting a “Monitor Forum” to pray specifically about issues presented in the Christian Science Monitor.

• Attending church with a group of other young adult Christian Scientists in the area.

• Organizing activities that extend into the greater community, such as community service.

• Hosting an adult Sunday school.

• Holding Bible study or group Bible lesson reading.

A few young adults shared that group organizing in a way that expresses Mrs. Eddy’s definition of church presented in the Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures – “The structure of Truth and Love; whatever rests upon and proceeds from divine Principle...” – is church activity. This may take a different form than the traditional approach to church.
“Ultimately, all this organizing needs to lead to church. And, if it in any way it leads Christian Scientists away from church, it isn’t helpful, and isn’t worth the effort to organize. When I say “church” I am thinking of “...WHATEVER RESTS UPON AND PROCEEDS FROM DIVINE PRINCIPLE.” Therefore, I could see it being extremely helpful to help teach young adults how to organize themselves into small informal groups, and figure out how to make a significant impact on the community, as opposed to brick and mortar approach to church organization. Our generation needs to figure out how to keep Christian Science above the surface while also being flexible to meet the immediate need in our community. 20s/30s need some encouragement on how to execute these informal groups, and I can see this type of organizing as really helping to meet a future need.”

Most young adults who participated in focus groups, however, expressed a desire for a space to connect, explore, and discuss with other spiritually like-minded individuals that extends beyond their concept of church. In part, this is because traditional Christian Science churches do not provide the space for the type of spiritual exploration that they are looking for:

“I love our church community, but I don’t know if I’d feel comfortable asking some questions or talking about things with some of them because there’s that stigma of ‘you shouldn’t be worrying about this kind of stuff.’ But that’s the reality of things. The world’s changing.”

“Testimonies aren’t very much a group dialogue – I miss Sunday school and want more of that. I felt like we went from Sunday school and camp to nothing. I thought the Affinity Group was a nice place to land. I’d love to find a place to have conversations.”

The questions then are:

- What activities foster the type of connection that young adult Christian Scientists, and potentially other spiritually-minded individuals, are looking for that bolsters connection to the Christian Science community and supports spiritual growth?
- How are these activities organized?
- What role do organizations play in supporting these activities?

**Interest in Activities**

Participants in focus groups shared a multitude of activities that they would be interested to take part in with other young adult Christian Scientists or like-minded individuals.¹² Some of the most prominent activities include:

¹² See Appendix 2.4.
- Local social activities, including outdoor adventure.
- Topical, in-person or online discussions.
- Sponsored spiritual talks.
- Bible study.
- Community service.
- Spiritual summit or weekend activity.

On the final survey, respondents were asked to pick up to five activities from a list of 15 activity ideas that were surfaced in focus groups. The top five activities in order of popularity include *local social activities, an adventure trip, a weekend vacation, a weekend at camp, and a weekend spiritual summit*.¹³

Please pick up to five of the following activities that you would be most interested to participate in with other young adult Christian Scientists

\[ n = 222 \quad \text{skipped} = 59 \]

13 These results are from both invested and divested audiences that indicated interest in activities with other young adult Christian Scientists. There are some differences in the top five activities respondents are interested in depending on marital status and whether or not respondents have children. For example, young adults who are married and/or have children expressed greater interest in activities that have more spiritual substance such as topical in-person spiritual discussions, a spiritual summit, and fellowship activities around church. See Appendix 1.2 for more info on the differences.
Local Social Activities

The majority of focus group attendees also expressed the most interest in local social activities. In particular, participants emphasized the importance of social activities for building trust with others, thereby developing deeper relationships. Trust helps people become more comfortable sharing challenges or spiritual insights, which are often more personal. Therefore, social activities can be a stepping stone to activities that have greater spiritual depth.

“I think part of it is the necessity for shared experiences where you are able to interact with people. I think [DiscoveryBound] NLC (the National Leadership Council) illustrated that really well and the [CS] camps too... One of the things that is missing that DiscoveryBound is bringing to the church [is] this sense of shared experience. The church itself does not do an especially good job of creating events that could be shared experiences... I think that’s a critical part of keeping people engaged and getting people to [talk about] Christian Science across different age ranges.”

“That gets back to the idea of having social events where you get to know each other. You do a couple of those and then, once you all feel like you know each other, you are ready for a deeper, more meaningful and open conversation. Cause I wouldn’t want to open up with a bunch of people I don’t know until I feel comfortable and they are little more like friends.”

“Even watching a sports game or having a meal can have wonderful conversations that promote spiritual growth, and be just as valuable as the more traditional approach and church services.”

One suggestion that some focus group participants who had organized a DiscoveryBound activity shared was to remove the current requirement for social activities to have a “spiritual component.” Participants shared that this requirement sometimes seems forced or insincere in an activity that is about fellowship.

“...That structured time when we’re going to sit and reflect and talk about spirituality is forcing [Christian Science] down people’s throats. There is really no reason for that. I’m so on the band wagon of just having a type of network of people where you can be like ‘hey a bunch of us are going to get pizza.’”

“I liked the idea of just planning a hike one weekend and it would be open. It would be a Christian Science organized event, maybe organized by someone in the church, but open to others. Not even like, ‘we’re going to go up this mountain then we’re going to have a lesson reading’, but just having an outlet for things to naturally come up.”
**In-Person or Online Discussions, Bible Study, and Sponsored Spiritual Talks**

Many focus group participants shared a desire for local activities that have greater spiritual depth. Two frequent suggestions included having group discussions on spiritually-related topics or sponsoring talks specifically for young adults. Some specific ideas regarding discussions included:

- An organization publishes discussion topics and encourages groups of young adults to get together and talk about them.
- Reading the Weekly Bible Lesson as a group.
- Bible study.
- Individually reading parts of the Bible, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, the *Manual* of The Mother Church, or other works by Mary Baker Eddy and then meeting with a group to talk about what was read.
- Roundtable discussion with a practitioner.

> “I was [at a mega church] for a couple of years and participated in their small group program. I think they actually do it really well. They talk a lot about, ‘we don’t do church in rows, we do church in circles.’ So everyone goes to the big rows but the growth really happens in that small group with the little circle.”

> “…to have a bigger community to be able to bounce ideas off of.”

**Community Service**

Community service was another popular activity suggestion in focus groups. Many participants in discussion groups said that they would like to see churches or individuals who attend a church organize groups to participate in community service. They saw community service as an integral part of connecting with and benefiting the greater community.

> “…service projects can be really useful for churches. It can just be local service. You can partner with local governments who are always excited to get groups to serve.”

> “If you did a community service event, that’s where you would get the social interaction. But you are going there for a purpose and working together. It might not feel so, ‘we’re going bowling with strangers.’ Instead you’re like ‘if I get to know someone that’s great, but I still have done this service.’”
Focus Group Moderator: “Do you think organizations play a role in organizing community service?”

Participant: “I think local churches are a great way to organize that—like local branch churches... I know there were a bunch of really awesome testimonies last annual meeting about churches getting involved in community and helping out the community and I think branch churches would be really awesome.”

**Weekend Events: Outdoor Adventure Trip, Weekend at Camp, Vacation, Spiritual Summit**

There was interest in weekend activities for young adult Christian Scientists shared in focus groups. Outdoor adventure was talked about as a type of social activity that a group of young adults could engage in. However, an outdoor adventure trip did not come up more than once or twice in a focus group. Many divested individuals also expressed interest in participating in outdoor adventure activities.

Many who had participated in a weekend activity through DiscoveryBound or TMC Youth had a positive experience and would enjoy attending one again. They were viewed as a particularly valuable shared experience because the extended amount of time spent with others, compared to a local activity that lasts for a day or less, helps develop stronger connections. Regional and national activities were also seen as an opportunity to interact with the larger community of young adult Christian Scientists.

“I kind of wish we had something now, something national that wasn’t just local.”

“I got to go to three TMC Youth summits. Those were awesome. [Person] and I are the only people our age in our church. Everyone else is either a generation or two generations older.... The summits were awesome not only to hang out with people more or less our own age, but also focus on talking about Christian Science topics. So I do miss that.”

Similar to local social activities, even though the event doesn’t necessarily have a spiritual component, a weekend vacation with other young adult Christian Scientists was thought to naturally spur conversation about spirituality. Advertising a weekend event as a vacation, since many people would likely be taking vacation time off work to attend, was regarded as attractive to some in focus groups.

“... that appeals to me because it’s a vacation. Some of the DiscoveryBound events are kind of like vacations, but they’re not branded as that. It’s more like this thing that you have to go do and participate whereas a vacation you just kind of go and you are enjoying where you are going and the Christian Science just naturally happens.”

Overall, because young adults in different communities expressed interest in a variety of different activities, focus group participants suggested supporting a mixture of activities—social, service, and spiritual.
Organizing Activities

The Important Role of Consistency and Leadership

One of the key ingredients for organizing activities, which fosters lasting connections, is consistency. As mentioned above, most young adults are looking to develop deeper relationships with peers. Focus group participants shared that frequent engagement would be more effective in creating a lasting community and would help young adults, many of whom have busy schedules, plan ahead. Many young adults in focus groups suggested they would like to connect with other young adult Christian Scientists at least once every couple months. Others shared a few times a year would be enough for them.

“To me the goal is to do it frequently enough so you don’t go out of your comfort bubble to see these people.”

“I don’t think it has to be a weekly event. But something more than twice a year.”

Not surprisingly, research participants said efforts to engage young adults should prioritize local-level activities, followed by activity at regional and national levels. The majority of survey respondents said organizations should focus their efforts on supporting young adult Christian Scientists on the local level. Young adults in focus groups agreed and shared that they feel most invested in building local connections with peers and that local activity has the best chance of being consistent.

“We can still do it as adults, and I know Adventure Unlimited is trying very hard to offer things for adults, but it’s really hard when you now have a job and all these responsibilities. And it’s really hard to go somewhere for a couple of weeks, or even a week. So it’d be nice to have more local things for adults.”

A second key ingredient for organizing activities is leadership. There was widespread acknowledgment in discussions that activities don’t happen without an individual or a group of people taking initiative to plan activities. At the local level, young adults shared they are most likely to attend an activity if a local peer plans the activity and invites them. This is similar to how DiscoveryBound Outreach chapter events are put together—a member of the local community is in charge of planning and outreach.

“Ultimately it comes down to having the people willing to do it themselves. There may be some structural things you can put in place like offering ideas, a stipend, etc. but at end of the day it takes a person willing to organize.”

14 See Appendix 3.2.
"I think having multiple people to help would be good. I know it’s a lot of pressure for one person to handle it all. I’m thinking in my head that I should help with these things."

**Less Interest in “Structured” Activity**

Despite the considerable interest for local community initiatives shared in focus groups, respondents of the focus group follow-up survey indicated a general reluctance to participate in traditionally structured activities.\(^{15}\) Even though 89% of respondents said they have a desire to stay connected with other young adult Christian Scientists or like-minded individuals, only 56% indicated they would be interested in participating in structured activities or programs for young adult Christian Scientists or others interested in participating in an uplifting environment.\(^{16}\) Focus group discussions helped elucidate the reason for a lack of interest in these types of activities.

First, discussions suggested the word “organized” may be the reason for less interest. Focus group participants indicated they sometimes associate “organized activity” as being over-prescribed, which was described as feeling rigid, contrived, inauthentic, or impersonal. Some young adults automatically associate activities put together by an organization like DiscoveryBound as being contrived or impersonal, often because these individuals have little connection to the organization or attendees of the event.\(^{17}\)

"I have noticed significant pushback from large segments of this community when the activity feels organized. Maybe something that’s organized also has the perception of being forced, just as many young adults (not just Christian Scientists) are generally opposed to organized religion."

"I’m wary of activities with an organizational stamp on it. It seems more like a regulated activity instead of natural fellowship."

Focus Group Moderator: “Do you feel that the lack of sincerity or genuineness from organizations [as felt by a focus group participant] comes from just being an organization?”

Participant: “Yeah I think so. I think it’s bigger than Christian Science organization. It’s not doing anything wrong, but just the idea that it’s a little less personal.”

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\(^{15}\) Parents indicated that they would be more likely to attend an “organized” activity.

\(^{16}\) Twenty-three percent said that they would be moderately interested and thirteen percent said that they would be slightly interested to participate in organized activities or programs for young adult Christian Scientists and others who are interested in participating in an uplifting environment (See Appendix 3.1). n = 95; skipped = 3.

\(^{17}\) Some focus group members shared that they are often reluctant to attend an activity because they don’t know anybody participating.
Similarly, research participants shared young adults sometimes feel reluctant to participate in an activity organized by an organization because they worry about being judged for making lifestyle or healthcare decisions that are perceived as not being acceptable in a Christian Science community. Some of these choices include going to the doctor, having a beer or glass of wine, living with a significant other before marriage, not attending church, or being gay. Focus groups revealed young adults are diverse in terms of their experiences and their thoughts on how lifestyle or healthcare decisions relate to being a Christian Scientist. For some, they see organizations expressing opinions about what activities are right or wrong and this creates distrust toward organizations and sometimes other Christian Scientists.

“There seems to be a fear of judgment of not knowing all the answers, or of not being a good Christian Scientist in the way that someone thinks is perfectly cut.”

“The Christian Science communities have put a bad taste in my mouth. When I read Science and Health it does not say these things quite as strictly. To me, everyone is in their own experience and some people need glasses, some people take medicine now and then, some people like coffee, some people drink alcoholic beverages. I think it all depends on the motivation behind it. My time at [organization 1] and [organization 2] puts a bad taste in my mouth where it’s more strict and rule based instead of acting out of morality – thinking for yourself and your best intentions. I like to be a free thinking adult. I like to have a beer. I don’t think that makes me bad or not a Christian Scientist, but I think to a lot of people it would.”

“One of the issues [is that] the changing forms of this experience have put a pressure on institutions to decide more of what is acceptable and what is not in terms of how individuals live their lives and where they are in the stages of spiritual understanding, which in some ways creates larger variations in terms of the practices that people have. I think we’ve hit a point where the institutions in the movement in general are trying to figure out, and individuals are trying to figure out, what is an absolute truth and what is right and what is wrong and what is the role of institutions in enforcing or having opinions on that.”

At the same time, young adults have appreciated having an environment where they can engage with other like-minded individuals away from alcohol, tobacco, and drugs.18

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18 The final survey showed that the majority of respondents who said it was important that their spiritual community was with other Christian Scientists (78%) either completely identified or strongly identified with this statement: “I enjoy being in an environment free from alcohol, tobacco, and/or drugs.” But focus groups revealed that there are differing views about the role of moral standards in activities for young adults. While most participants shared that they do not mind (and often enjoy) participating in an event without alcoholic beverages, tobacco, or marijuana, the largest complaint was the presumption that people who partake in any of those activities outside of the event are less spiritual, less pure, or less of a Christian Scientist.
“As our culture moves towards accepting those practices, regardless of your belief [of] what’s right and what’s wrong, the institutions themselves—which to your point I’m glad you said at the beginning we’re not talking about the faith we’re talking about the institutions—have been forced to adapt to how they are best to serve the cause of Christian Science in how they enforce moral standards or how they support us. What’s been challenging for me is that I really, really feel that having these institutions are important. If I want to get away [from] a culture that revolves around drinking and revolves around materiality and to your point revolves around conversations of medical condition, I turn to my CS community. And this is a question that I don’t know the answer to....”

When asked what young adults want activities to look and feel like, common responses were that they want activities to be personal, causal, genuine, meaningful, and feel like a natural fellowship. Many young adults will use the overarching term “organic” to represent this kind of activity organization. Terms such as “meet-up” or “informal gathering” were used more fondly than “organized activity.”

Participants shared that, in order to feel organic, activities should be:

- Low commitment.
- Spontaneous-feeling.
- Spurred by local peer-led community.

Furthermore, findings from the final survey suggest that of the various factors young adults consider when they are making a decision to participate in a group activity with other Christian Scientists (e.g. purpose of activity, structure, atmosphere, brand and other people who attend), atmosphere is very important. Purpose and people who attend are also regarded as moderately to very important, and structure and brand are less important.

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19 See Appendix 2.2 for strategies to make activities feel organic.
In your experience, how important have each of the following factors been in making a decision to participate in a group activity with other Christian Scientists?

(Only respondents who indicated it was important that their spiritual community was with other Christian Scientists answered this question)

\[ n = 187 \quad \text{skipped} = 6 \]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Not Important</th>
<th>Slightly Important</th>
<th>Moderately Important</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Extremely Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Atmosphere of activity (e.g. feels authentic, open, inclusive)</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People who attend</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of activity (e.g. social, spiritual, mission-focused)</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure of activity (e.g. organized by an organization vs. a community member)</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand of activity (e.g. DiscoveryBound 20s/30s vs. other name vs. no name)</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, focus group discussions suggested that purpose, atmosphere, and, to some degree people who attend are closely associated with structure and brand.

**The Barrier of Time and Expense**

One barrier for participating in or, in particular, planning an activity is limited time. Some focus group attendees shared that they are already involved in a lot of activity and it is difficult for them to commit to organizing or attending additional events.

“This is a side, but I think time is a huge factor. I don’t know if everybody has been too busy to do things, but in this day in age everyone is doing more. For us it’s appealing to do something like that but I feel like we wouldn’t do it at this point in our lives because it’s so much more of a hassle.”

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20 Outside Research suggests that the brand name itself does not influence perceptions about the brand as much as the experiences that the brand has created.
Some of the ways to overcome the barrier of time that were shared include:

- Planning ahead – provide enough notice for local and national activities.
- Be consistent – plan activities on a regular schedule so people know to plan ahead for them.
- Be simple – plan activities that are easy and a low time commitment.

Similarly, participants shared cost may be a barrier for larger events. The greatest number of survey respondents (46%) indicated they would be willing to spend between $100 and $200 to attend a long weekend activity (excluding travel expenses).\(^{21}\)

![Chart showing willingness to spend on a long weekend activity](chart)

What is the most amount of money that you would be willing to spend to attend a long weekend activity (excluding travel expenses)?

- Over $300: 6%
- $201-$300: 14%
- $100-$200: 46%
- Under $100: 35%

Overall, discussion about how to form groups and put together activities suggests young adults are sensitive about the way activities are structured, as well as how much time they have to devote to activities. An event’s atmosphere is an important consideration for many young adults and the way an activity is structured and branded often conveys impressions about what the atmosphere will be like. Young adults are more attracted to activities that feel “organic” (peer initiated and community-driven) and are less inclined to attend something that seems “structured.” However, they see leadership and consistency as essential elements to building successful community.

This reveals the fundamental challenge for planning local activities. Focus group participants acknowledged it is hard to develop communities that feel meaningful and personal because it requires time, effort, and regularity of engagement to build fulfilling relationships. One of the common deterrents for attending an activity young adults shared is not knowing other people and not feeling like they have much in common with other participants other than being a student of Christian Science.

> “When the main uniting factor has just been the fact that we’re all young Christian Scientists, the conversation has been fun and lighthearted, but superficial. I have friends that constantly push me to think deeply, and I haven’t felt a need to find that in Christian Science specific group activities.”

\(^{21}\) These results are from both invested and divested audiences that indicated interest in activities with other young adult Christian Scientists.
It seems there needs to be a purpose or common goal for young adults to unite around, as well as an instigator and support that helps get activities going and maintains momentum. While an organization may play a vital role in helping to initiate engagement, individuals in the community must identify their reasons for wanting to organize with others and help make it happen.

In the final survey, invested respondents confirmed there is still a strong desire to engage in group activities with other young adult Christian Scientists and less (but potentially ample) desire to lead them. Eighty-three percent of survey respondents who indicated they were invested, and a few respondents who indicated they were divested, said they would like to attend activities for young adult Christian Scientists; 26% of invested respondents said they’d like to be involved in the planning of activities. Of the total respondents, 68% percent said they would like to attend group activities for young adult Christian Scientists.22

The Organization’s Role in Supporting Activity and Community

When focus group participants were asked generally what role they think organizations should play in serving young adults who have a connection to Christian Science, common responses were:

- Help young adult Christian Scientists build connections and encourage engagement with each other.
- Support the practice of Christian Science outside of church.
- Support opportunities for engagement with the greater community.
- Play no role in serving young adult Christian Scientists.

The final survey shows the majority of respondents who said it is important that their spiritual community is with other Christian Scientists think that Adventure Unlimited should prioritize helping young adult Christian Scientists build connections and/or foster engagement with other young adult Christian Scientists. Supporting the learning and practice of Christian Science outside of church (through activities such as Bible study, topical discussions, spiritual talks etc.) and providing opportunities for engagement with the greater community (through community service, interfaith engagement, social/environmental justice engagement etc.) should be prioritized next.

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22 These statistics include the people who skipped the question in the total percentage of people who responded (n=281). Even though it is impossible to tell exactly why somebody chose not to respond to the question, the people who skipped were included to glean a more accurate statistic.
How do you think organizations should serve young adult Christian Scientists?
Please rank the following choices in order of importance. (Select all that apply)

\[ n = 184 \text{ skipped } = 9 \]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choice</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Help build connections and/or foster engagement with other young adult Christian Scientists</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support learning and practice of Christian Science outside of church (e.g. bible study, topical discussions, spiritual talks, etc.)</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide opportunities for engagement with greater community (e.g. community service, interfaith engagement, or social/environmental justice engagement etc.)</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support career networking and development</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizations should play no role in serving young adult Christian Scientists</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Supporting Local Activity**

Attendees in focus groups talked about organizations “being a unifying force,” supporting “natural fellowship instead of regulated activities.” One individual shared organizations should be a “host, not a facilitator” and “create an empowering place for people to access another group of people [who care about the same things] to organize in their own ways and do things” (e.g. practice Christian Science, community service, outdoor activity, etc.) and “to access another group of people who also care in order to organize in their own ways and do things.” These comments are consistent with sentiments that activities should be organic.

However, even though the most attractive activities are community-organized, individuals in the community don’t always feel they have the tools, networks, time, or encouragement to organize groups of people. This is where organizations can step in. Focus group participants shared that organizations can play an important role in nurturing community by providing some stimulation, structure, resources, and facilitating connections with others in the area.

“I think it should be the local community. But in the absence of that, because I don’t think that is happening now, it’s only going to happen if groups like…Adventure Unlimited reach out to a local host and having them organizing it. I think the idea for people [in their] 20s and 30s [is] it’s all about being genuine and sincere.”

“[Organizations] don’t necessarily need to organize an event. Sometimes it seems contrived. But being able to provide information or connect people [is valuable]. It’s just hard to know who is around. At the same time I think it depends on the community to make it happen.”
“My initial thoughts are that yes, there is an opportunity for organizations to at least create or set up a venue or a space for people to get to know each other. The deep conversation happens when you really get to know someone, and organizations can’t create that. But providing an initial platform for people to get to know each other.”

“This conversation is a good example, sometimes you need a little push to get together. There is still desire to get together, but we need to have someone to plan it.”

Some specific suggestions from focus groups about how an organization might support this type of engagement include:

- Help young adult Christian Scientists build networks and community with each other (through dinners, activities, social media, shared contact information, etc.).
- Identify local hosts interested in putting together an informal activity and work with them to create events and organize groups.
- Provide ideas and resources to support community engagement (e.g. activity ideas, contact information, financial support, etc.).
- Help spread the word about young adult activities and engagement (through emails, social media, an online calendar, etc.).

On the final survey, the top six resources that respondents who said it is important that their spiritual community is with other Christian Scientists found most useful, in order of popularity, were:

- A calendar of regional and/or national activities for young adult Christian Scientists.
- Contact information for other people interested in community or activity for young adult Christian Scientists.
- Venues to host activities (e.g. homes, community centers, camps).
- Money to subsidize more expensive activities.
- DiscoveryBound staff to help develop community, plan activities, and make connections.
- Map showing groups of young adult Christian Scientists across the country.
Please pick up to five of the following resources that would be most useful for helping you engage with other young adult Christian Scientists

\[ n = 184 \quad \text{skipped} = 9 \]

- Calendar of regional and/or national activities for young adult Christian Scientists: 81%
- Contact information for other people interested in community or activity for young adult Christian Scientists: 52%
- Venues to host activities (e.g. homes, community centers, camps): 51%
- Money to subsidize more expensive activities: 49%
- DiscoveryBound staff to help develop community, plan activities, and make connections: 48%
- Map showing groups of young adult Christian Scientists across the country: 47%
- Social media platform (e.g. Facebook group): 42%
- Resource kits to jumpstart community or activity planning: 24%
- Discussion forum: 17%
- None of the above: 2%

Many focus group participants also emphasized a website or social media platform would be useful. These were also popular resources on the final survey.

At the local level, research participants conveyed that activity is only likely to happen if there are individuals or groups of people who are willing to organize. An organization may plan a few activities to provide impetus, but consistency ultimately depends on the community.

“…As long as there are motivated people in the area. It depends on the community and if there is interest. I know there are lots of communities where I don’t know if they would [be interested in planning activities].”

The focus groups and interviews conducted in this research serve as an example of how engagement from Adventure Unlimited can spur greater community organizing. After these discussions, many individuals expressed interest in planning activities for young adult Christian Scientists in their area. One example is in Austin, Texas where regular DB 20s/30s activities are being planned after the research consultant connected with an individual who was
moving to Austin and who wanted to bring together the local community through DiscoveryBound activities. The following quote is from a group in New York City who also expressed enthusiasm for planning activities.

“If anything, you brought us together and helped us recognize that we really would like to do something. So whether [or not] we get official funding, I think we have all the tools that we need; we are smart enough to organize something.”

**Supporting Regional and National Activity**

Additionally, participants in focus groups shared that even though they see the greatest need for engagement at the local level, organizations might play a more direct role in planning and orchestrating activities on a larger scale—regionally or nationally. This is in contrast to the more hands-off approach that young adults think organizations should take at the local level. These comments are congruent with findings from the final survey in which weekend activities were among the top five activities that survey respondents would be most interested to participate in with other young adult Christian Scientists.

**Communication**

**How Organizations Should Communicate with Young Adults**

Focus group participants shared personal outreach or an invitation from somebody they know is the most effective form of communication, which is in line with comments about wanting activities to feel personal and authentic. This is one of the reasons why local leadership is important for planning activities because these leaders are more likely to have established networks with the community.

“It’s one thing to get a blast email saying ‘here’s this thing.’ It’s another thing to get a personal ‘hey I’m thinking about doing this. Do you want to join me?’ If you’re talking about that tactic, word-of-mouth marketing it’s the most effective.”

The focus group follow-up survey, however, conveyed that young adults want to be communicated to by organizations through email and social media. Further discussion revealed that while personal outreach (either through phone or email) is the most effective, email blasts or social media posts are the next-best ways to communicate with young adults if an organization is unable to reach out personally.

**How Young Adults Want to Communicate with Each Other**

Focus groups and the focus group follow-up survey suggest young adults value face-to-face connection most. Although, some focus group attendees shared that a social media or other online platform would be a valuable tool to engage with young adults. There was disagreement, however, about which platforms were most practical. Some young adults conveyed that Facebook would be the ideal medium because most people are already active

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23 See Case Studies.
24 See Appendix 3.1.
25 See Appendix 3.1.
on the platform and Facebook already has a robust social capability. Furthermore, Facebook has been used with demonstrated success to plan local face-to-face activities in areas around the country. On the other hand, others shared that Facebook feels cluttered and overused. Ideas for online communication networks other than Facebook that were presented included:

- A social media platform built just for young adult Christian Scientists.
  
  » This social media platform might include, but is not limited to, features such as a mobile app, a map/directory showing other young adult Christian Scientists in the area, a discussion forum, and capability to organize in-person activities.

- An online discussion forum to talk about topical issues that are pertinent to young adults.

- A web or social media page to share activity ideas and have a calendar of events.

The last suggestion for a web or social media page to share activity ideas and have a calendar of events was most enthusiastically supported as a feasible means for online communication in focus groups and was also backed up by the final survey (a calendar of regional and/or national activities for young adult Christian Scientists was the most popular resource that young adults would find most useful for helping them engage with other young adult Christian Scientists.)

Critics of the idea of a social media platform built just for young adult Christian Scientists point to the fact that it would be costly, time-intensive, and have little certainty that it would be widely used. Additionally, the final survey didn’t demonstrate much support for the idea of a discussion forum.

While an online communication platform may be a beneficial tool, some focus group participants emphasized that it should be supplementary to the interpersonal networking with individuals who are interested in spurring engagement for young adult Christian Scientists.

“Figure out the system and the network after you’ve got twelve of these groups on fire and then connect them.”

**Case Studies**

**Bay Area and New England Affinity Group**

Over the past couple of years, a few individuals and groups have experimented with ways to organize local activity for young adult Christian Scientists. These examples offer insights about the types of strategies that more successfully facilitate group organizing as well as the methods that don’t.

The Bay Area Affinity Group started in 2004 as the first DiscoveryBound chapter for individuals in their 20s and 30s. It was originally governed by a board of young adults. In 2008, Stephanie led the initiative and did much of the

26 See Case Studies.
27 See Appendix 3.2.
28 See Appendix 3.2.
29 The role of the board and the Affinity Group is outlined in the Affinity Board Handbook.
legwork for organizing events. Under her leadership, the board worked effectively and the group grew to hundreds of members. They held a variety of events, including monthly ice cream + church testimony meetings.

After a few years, the board became less active and Stephanie filled the void by planning most events herself. When Stephanie left the group, Johanna took over and ran the club for one to two years, although events were less regular. Despite the fact that the group still had a board of five people, it was not very active in planning events.

When Johanna left the group, a new leader was not assigned and the board decided to share responsibility in organizing events. However, board members rarely took the initiative. Over the next few years, many board members stepped away and new members joined, but the board consistently remained at about five members. During this time (2010-2015), board member David planned most of the events, but he lived over an hour from the Bay Area.

Although the Affinity Group was losing momentum each year (only one event occurred in 2016), it was still kept somewhat active through the new DiscoveryBound young adult regional events that Stephanie initiated through her position as DiscoveryBound’s western regional manager.

When David moved to Boston in 2016, he modeled a different strategy for organizing activities in the greater Boston area, and called it the New England Affinity Group.

David tried to keep the elements of the Bay Area Affinity Group that worked well, while improving on some things that didn’t work as well. He had observed that the board model was not an effective way to manage a group. Thus, he created a non-hierarchical structure where anyone could set up an event. Engagement depended on the community. However, in order to get people used to the idea of planning activities, David initially had to spearhead much of the planning and delegating.

David tried to keep management as simple as possible. Some of the key elements to his method included:

- Communicating through email and Facebook. David claims email was the most effective way to communicate with people. He created a Gmail account (affinitynewengland@gmail.com) where people could opt in to receive emails. A strict “on or off” email policy was maintained in order to allow anyone to choose to leave the group without their email being saved.

- David communicated with the email list at least once a month. Consistency and regular activity was crucial for keeping people engaged.

- Creating a name (Affinity Group) gave the young adult group a unique identity.

- Events were kept simple, low cost, and low commitment.

Overall, David reported mixed success. Some activities were very well attended while others had fewer participants. David shared that some of the simplest activities were attractive to the largest group of people, such as a board game night hosted by a local Bostonian. He also shared that even though his intent was to try to make these groups as organic and informal as possible, it was still “too organized” for some of the attendees. Even so, David conveyed the activities continued to play an important role in building community:

“When I came to Boston, I purposefully re-purposed the Affinity Group idea to be much less formally organized than the Bay Area had been, and it’s still too organized for many
people. But that organization also builds momentum, and even if a large contingent of the community isn't actively participating in that momentum, they're still aware of it. One of the greatest things about the New England Affinity Group has been the events that have happened outside of it... informal game nights, ultimate Frisbee gatherings, etc. They're the same events we've been ‘organizing', but these are started by individuals and then word spreads organically. They're usually more successful than the official Affinity Group events. For example, a couple of the group members decided to host a Friendsgiving, but they didn't use the Affinity Group to promote it. 31 people ended up coming—more than any of the Affinity Group's events thus far. The ironic thing is that these informal young adult gatherings were not happening before the Affinity Group ‘organization' started.”

Even though the New England Affinity Group is a formal group and may carry some of the stigmas associated with organization and formality, it serves as an example of how a group with some leadership, purpose, and consistent engagement provides the impetus for community development and interaction.

**Front Range Affinity Group**

In the Denver-Boulder metro area a group of people, including the research consultant, attempted to model the New England Affinity Group by creating the Front Range Affinity Group.

Similar to the New England group, the Front Range Affinity Group created an email account and Facebook group and planned the first activity which consisted of a talk, lunch, and discussion with two Christian Science lecturers. The group also planned a five other activities throughout the year; like the New England activities, some were well attended and others weren’t.

In contrast to the New England group, however, the Front Range Affinity Group found Facebook to be the most effective way to communicate with people. While the group continues to use email to send event invitations (primarily to reach people on the email list who have not joined the Facebook group), Facebook has facilitated communication between a core group of people who consistently have attended the activities.

While there continues to be interest in participation in Affinity Group activities, the group is not currently self-run. This means that members of the group have not been stepping up to plan activities themselves. This is the ultimate goal for the group. Recently, an idea was suggested that each month a different Affinity member take the group to their favorite location or activity. However, this has not yet been implemented.

Even though the group has not yet been the catalyst for regular activity, as the founders had intended, its existence has had some positive consequences including:

- Greater awareness of and interaction between young adult Christian Scientists in the Denver-Boulder area.
- More communication between young adults, including sharing lectures and events hosted by local churches.
- Participation by young adults that don’t attend church any longer.

**Austin DB 20s/30s Chapter**

A couple of individuals in Austin, TX have revitalized the Austin DiscoveryBound chapter for families, teens, and young adults. The chapter is run by two young adults, Jessica and Jessica. Together they planned monthly young
adult activities in Austin since September, 2016. Since the inception of these activities, they have seen increasing engagement.

Jessica shares that the “interest and attendance in these events have been more than [they] could have hoped for.” Since the first event, they have seen an increase in the number of young adults attending events as well as church services, including individuals who live an hour away wanting to come and participate. Jessica said, “many of the young adults will sit together, or go out to lunch after church.”

Like the Front Range Affinity Group, the Austin DB 20s/30s chapter uses Facebook as their primary form of communication. However, they also maintain an email list for people who aren’t on Facebook. Jessica claims that one of their biggest supports has been joining forces with Asher House and the Asher House manager. The Asher House is well-located in Austin (next to The University of Texas Austin campus) and provides a space for the group to host regular events.

The focus group held in Austin drew people who didn’t attend church. After the focus group, some of these individuals started attending the DB 20s/30s activities and occasionally church services. Jessica felt that the focus group discussion provided a place for these individuals to “feel heard and valued” and made them feel more comfortable joining a group of Christian Scientists.

Going forward, Jessica feels that one of the biggest questions is knowing what to call the group. Right now they are calling themselves a DB 20s/30s chapter, but only one of their activities have had a spiritual purpose. The other activities have been focused on fun and fellowship. Therefore, they are unsure if they can use the DB 20s/30s name for all of their activities.

Furthermore, Jessica recommends that individuals planning these activities work together with all organizations—Asher House, Prin Club, DiscoveryBound, etc. This creates a sense of cohesiveness between various activities that would otherwise be siloed.

**Constructive Criticism of Christian Science Communities**

Invested and divested focus group participants spent a great deal of time talking about aspects of Christian Science communities that they dislike. They also provided some recommendations about what they’d like to see Christian Science communities strive for. Some of the aspects they dislike include:

- Judgment and/or exclusion of individuals for making certain lifestyle or healthcare decisions (e.g. going to a doctor/hospital, drinking alcoholic beverages, living with a significant other before marriage, not going to church, having premarital sex).

- A lack of openness or opportunity to talk about “tough issues” in some Christian Science communities. Many young adults want a space where they can actively explore questions regarding lifestyle and healthcare decisions, morality, identity, church, and spirituality.

- The “institutionalization” of Christian Science—certain decisions or practices by institutions come across as interpreting Christian Science. Some individuals see this as an interpretation of how someone is supposed to practice Christian Science, which individuals may or may not agree with.

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30 They organized an “Operation Testimony Meeting” where a group of young adults went to a Wednesday testimony meeting together.

31 Some activities included: Olympics opening ceremony party, pumpkin carving, Christmas cookie exchange.
• An absence of active engagement with social and community issues. Many young adults want their religious institutions to engage with these issues. Some expressed they see most Christian Science communities as older, upper-middle class, white individuals who are comfortably detached from many of the challenges that our communities and world face.

• The traditional church experience—individuals shared the following things they dislike about church: not engaging, no outlet for discussion, bureaucratic, no young people, feels unwelcome to young people, has little engagement with outside world, resistant to change.

In general, young adults want communities that are loving, accepting, forward-thinking, and allow for authentic exploration. They want to be in a non-judgmental environment where they aren’t told how to think, but given the space to genuinely explore. Many young adults haven’t felt one or more of these things in a Christian Science community, which causes some to disengage.

“Organizations seem to think it’s their job to mold and shape, instead of providing a space to mold and shape. They want to create Christian Scientists, instead of providing the space for people to learn and grow in Christian Science.”

“We’re all here growing and learning together, and therefore let’s embrace those challenges or the things that come up that we don’t really want to talk about because we [don’t] want to get involved in an erroneous sense of living, but also making sure that we take that on to see how we can grow and see it in a spiritual light. I think that’s definitely where the growth happens.”

“We just want to love Christian Science! That’s it! Don’t judge other people—what they choose to drink, etc. After a while they will feel so included and unjudged that they’ll feel more connected to how you as a Christian Scientist is living. It’s important to live Christian Science before preaching it. Preach by your actions. It’s part of you and your being and that’s what people will notice and love.”

“We need to change our culture to being open, accepting, loving. I don’t know how to do it, but I know that’s what we desperately need to work on.”

While these points may not directly influence a program or activity, they point to aspects of the Christian Science community that young adults would like to see changed. It’s important to note young adults are diverse in regards to their thoughts about Christian Science communities and the points above don’t reflect the thinking of all young adults that we talked to. However, each of these grievances came up unprovoked in multiple focus groups across the country, suggesting they are greater trends in thought.
Encouraging Change in Christian Science Community

Some suggestions for how communities and organizations can overcome some of the things young adults don’t like about Christian Science communities include:

• Fostering cultures of openness, authenticity, and non-judgment. Focus on living love, acceptance, honesty, and support.

• Create opportunities for dialogue between people within the Christian Science community who have different viewpoints on morality, lifestyle, and healthcare decisions.

• Create spaces for young adult peers to ask questions and talk openly about sensitive topics or challenges young adults face. Help young adult Christian Scientists build connections with each other.

• Restructure or remove rules in certain Christian Science communities. Some individuals think that standards requiring people not to drink alcoholic beverages, use drugs/tobacco, or have premarital sex are harmful in certain communities. Reasons include: (1) The standards convey a false sense about what it means to be a Christian Scientist. While they may be conducive for spiritual growth, there is too much attention put on these few expectations and not enough focus on other (some would say more important) elements of Christian character such as love, acceptance, charity etc. (2) They do not foster an environment where authentic, open dialogue and questioning on these topics is welcome. Individuals don’t feel comfortable sharing openly and speaking from experience when there is a danger of being excluded or judged. For many, this type of atmosphere does not feel conducive to growth and learning. (3) They are also thought to lead to judgment and/or exclusion of individuals who don’t always meet the expectations; some interviewees and focus group participants shared that they don’t feel comfortable participating in a Christian Science environment because their behavior doesn’t always match the expectations.

• Restructure or remove rules in certain Christian Science communities. (32)

• Create opportunities for people who aren’t Christian Scientists anymore to enjoy the Adventure Unlimited community.

• Develop greater ties with the outside community and engage in local issues through community outreach, service, and philanthropy.

Serving Divested Audiences

The research consultant talked with a variety of individuals who classified themselves as divested, each having a unique experience and relationship with Christian Science. Some considered themselves Christian Scientists and others didn’t; among those who didn’t consider themselves Christian Scientists, some considered themselves spiritual and sometimes attended a different religious denomination. With such diverse backgrounds, each individual had a different reason for why they stepped away from church or Christian Science.

Those who didn’t consider themselves Christian Scientists anymore often didn’t claim to accept or agree with the foundational premises taught in Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures. Others, including those who continued to consider themselves Christian Scientists, were turned away by some of the “cultural” aspects of Christian Science communities discussed in the previous section.

Many of the individuals who didn’t consider themselves Christian Scientists anymore shared that they appreciated aspects of their upbringing in Christian Science, some of which they use today. Some of the common things that they acknowledged include the close friendships they developed through camp or Principia, camp experiences, a loving standard for living life and interacting with others, freedom from materialistic thinking, deep and critical thinking, and the power of thought.

32 Some individuals think that standards requiring people not to drink alcoholic beverages, use drugs/tobacco, or have premarital sex are harmful in certain communities. Reasons include: (1) The standards convey a false sense about what it means to be a Christian Scientist. While they may be conducive for spiritual growth, there is too much attention put on these few expectations and not enough focus on other (some would say more important) elements of Christian character such as love, acceptance, charity etc. (2) They do not foster an environment where authentic, open dialogue and questioning on these topics is welcome. Individuals don’t feel comfortable sharing openly and speaking from experience when there is a danger of being excluded or judged. For many, this type of atmosphere does not feel conducive to growth and learning. (3) They are also thought to lead to judgment and/or exclusion of individuals who don’t always meet the expectations; some interviewees and focus group participants shared that they don’t feel comfortable participating in a Christian Science environment because their behavior doesn’t always match the expectations.
“The friends that I’ve made at Principia are the best people I will ever meet. Principia cultivated that. The friendships were certainly fantastic.”

“Christian Science gave me a foundation for how to think.”

“The approach to the world, the approach to relationships, the hopefulness of it the personals striving... I love all of that and I miss that.”

“I’m not an active Christian Scientist now. It’s very much hardwired in there. I really appreciate that in the realm of Christian Science there is ground zero a positive, limitless, approach. And that’s beautiful.”

“I am grateful for a sense of not being addicted to medicine.”

“I’m not sure whether I consider myself a Christian Scientist because of the dogma and stigma against it, [but] the one thing I find myself saying is that Christian Science meets you where you are at...Science and Health is not a book of hard fast rules about how you have to live your life, it’s a book full of words saying if you want to be the most spiritual you can be, you can do these things.”

A few divested research participants expressed interest in building connection and community with other young adult Christian Scientists.

Of the 33 respondents on the final survey who said they don’t attend church (9 considered themselves Christian Scientists, 19 did not consider themselves Christian Scientists, and 5 unknown), 15 of them indicated that they would be interested in participating in group activities with young adult Christian Scientists. The most popular activities were local social activities, an adventure trip, a volunteer trip, career skills workshops and/or networking fair, local community service, and a weekend vacation.

Focus groups confirmed that some divested individuals (the majority of these still considered themselves Christian Scientists) are interested in participating in activities with other young adult Christian Scientists. Some divested participants who didn’t consider themselves Christian Scientists conveyed that they would partake in events if the events align with their goals and provide a comfortable environment not to be a Christian Scientist. These individuals often expressed interest in outdoor adventure, community service, social/environmental justice...
engagement or interfaith activity. One participant who has felt particularly close with the 100 Elk Program but does not consider himself a Christian Scientist shared these sentiments:

“I'm looking for opportunities for ‘teemsanship’ and I think that's something that Adventure Unlimited did really well was building a team. For all the emails and newsletters that I'm on that are DiscoveryBound and Adventure Unlimited related, nobody has ever asked me to go do a trail maintenance project.... Nobody has ever [said], “Hey, 20s and 30s are getting together to volunteer with any type of shared mission or shared goal. And it doesn't have to have some religious bend to it but it's just an opportunity to be with a community that you're looking for, doing something that you feel is good or right with other people that agree with that. [This] is few and far between.... I often feel like unless I'm living up to the exact standard [as Christian Scientists] my goal can never be the same as their [goal] for going to church or for giving to the church.... But at the same time I'm there to explore my spirituality and if I'm in a setting like that I'm not closed off to what it is I'm looking for out of life or in my spiritual life. But when it gets turned around on how I'm living my life, I'm never going to be able to have those other conversations [because somebody else's] goal is to convince [me] that [I'm] wrong as opposed to [my] goal in being [there] to support.”

Other divested individuals feel a close connection to the organizations that they had been involved with growing up and would enjoy attending an alumni event, camp reunion, family or adult camp, or work as a staff member for 100 Elk Outdoor Center. While some feel perfectly comfortable participating in these activities, others expressed uncertainty about being included because they don’t practice Christian Science.

“I can’t tell you how many times I have thought about going back to work at A/U and 100 Elk--really wanting to but then being like but I can’t because of what I have chosen.”

“I feel like there are people who left Christian Science with a bitterness about it, but that’s not how I feel at all. But I also feel like there is a barrier where I can’t partake anymore because I’m not a practicing Christian Scientist.”
RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made in light of organizational research and to align with Adventure Unlimited’s mission and purpose: to provide activities that foster community, promote spiritual growth, and inspire a love for God and a willingness to turn to Him in prayer.

The findings are clear. Many young adult Christian Scientists are interested in greater connections and engagement with spiritually like-minded peers. This demographic values friendships with other “like minded” individuals who have a similar background in Christian Science, enjoys coming together in an environment where people aren’t drinking or smoking, and feels other young adult Christian Scientists can be useful spiritual resources to ask questions, work through challenges with, and make an impact on the larger community.33

While the interest exists, however, young adults don’t readily organize activities on their own. The research indicated organizations can help stimulate greater activity at the local level by connecting with communities and offering ideas, resources, and networks that help this demographic build connections and encourage interaction. Additionally, research participants expressed a desire to have more weekend gatherings, such as the regional or national events for Christian Science youth organized by DiscoveryBound or TMC Youth.

Therefore, Adventure Unlimited should focus on supporting young adult connections and peer-led activity at the local level as well as weekend activities of a larger scale. At least six months to a year of testing is needed to determine whether young adults will back up their interest with action.34

Focus Local

At the local level, Adventure Unlimited should engage with communities and provide resources, support, and encouragement in order to spur more organic organizing. The goal should be to identify strategies that overcome barriers preventing people from organizing or attending activities, such as limited time or networks and stigmas of “structured” activity.35

The survey revealed the top resources respondents thought would be useful for helping them engage with other young adult Christian Scientists.36 In addition to these resources, young adults making recommendations to Adventure Unlimited thought the following resources and strategies would be most useful for encouraging peer-led activity.

- Have a paid staff member who is able to devote time to working with young adults and helping plan activities.
- Identify young adults in local areas that are interested in helping to organize local activities and build community. Help these young adults network with others in their area.
- Host groups of young adults for a meal to give them the opportunity to talk about what they want to create as a community and how an organization might provide support.37 Adventure Unlimited could also host

33 See The Vital Role of Connection.
34 The research consultant met with the Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System (IAALS) to learn more about the research process. Researchers at IAALS recommended testing results for at least six months to a year to get sufficient data to judge the merits of a new initiative. This is because change takes time to be recognized and assimilated.
35 See Organizing Activities.
36 The top six in this order: A calendar of regional and/or national activities for young adult Christian Scientists; contact information for other people interested in community or activity for young adult Christian Scientists; venues to host activities (e.g., homes, community centers, camps); money to subsidize more expensive activities; DiscoveryBound staff to help develop community, plan activities and make connections; a map showing groups of young adult Christian Scientists across the country.
37 This was inspired by our focus groups. We received positive feedback on our focus group discussions and many participants expressed a desire to
• Plan occasional local DiscoveryBound activities to provide a space for young adults to connect and encourage them to continue interacting.

• Set up an online platform that provides an outlet for communication and a calendar of activities.
  » The Affinity Groups and Austin DB 20s/30s chapter experimented with an email list and Facebook group to communicate with young adult Christian Scientists and found value in both. Adventure Unlimited could encourage local groups to set up a Facebook group and email list for people who are interested in participating in activities.
  » Furthermore, focus group participants and survey respondents both indicated they’d like to have a communication platform that is open to a larger audience of young adult Christian Scientists. This could be a Facebook group or webpage that is hosted by DiscoveryBound to post upcoming national activities and provide a space for young adults to share ideas with each other.

• Set up a fund where young adults can apply for money to subsidize more expensive activities.

Additionally, participants in focus groups shared suggestions about how to plan attractive local activities. These tips can be used to help future planners.

Even though survey and focus group participants expressed the most interest in social activities, with outdoor adventure being a particularly popular choice, Adventure Unlimited should get to know the desires and aspirations of various communities of young adults and be willing to support a variety of activities as long as they contribute to greater fellowship and/or spiritual growth. Social activities build relationships and can lead to conversation about spirituality. Note, some people are looking for activity with more of a spiritual or service focus.

**Standards and Atmosphere**

Many young adult Christian Scientists indicated they appreciate participating in an environment where people aren’t drinking or smoking. However, many also don’t like judgement toward people who choose to drink alcoholic beverages (as well as have premarital sex or live with a significant other before marriage; smoking was hardly mentioned) outside of the activity or the presumption that people who do those activities are less spiritual or less of a Christian Scientist. It appeared there is a fine line between regulating an environment from alcohol, tobacco, and sexual activity and not being judgmental. A couple of suggestions for creating a comfortable and non-judgement environment for everyone include:

• Don’t specifically address moral standards in an invitation or waiver for an event. This should not be made the focus during an activity and the group of adults should address issues together if they arise. Most people already know DiscoveryBound activity is alcohol and smoke free.

continue to have these types of conversations.

38 See Case Studies.
39 See Communication.
40 Found in Appendix 2.1 and 2.3 as well as Case Studies.
41 See Interest in Activities.
42 See Organizing Activities.
43 See Organizing Activities.
• If organizers want to address moral standards in an invitation or waiver, simply state it is an alcohol and smoke free activity.

Adventure Unlimited should also make every effort to reach out to young adults personally. The research showed young adults value communication through personal emails or phone calls. Focus group participants shared they are most likely to participate in an activity if someone personally reaches out to them or they receive an invitation from somebody they know. In the absence of this, however, the best ways to reach young adults are through email blasts or social media posts.

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44 See Communication.
COLLABORATION

Over the course of this research, we have connected with other organizations serving Christian Scientists to identify opportunities to collaborate. The Principia, The Albert Baker Fund, and Asher Student Foundation have all conveyed interest in this study and are working with Adventure Unlimited to support young adults. Already, these organizations supported the research by providing contact information to Adventure Unlimited in order to reach a wider audience with the final survey. Additionally, Principia provided support with the design of the survey and Asher Student Foundation provided the use of Asher Houses to host focus group meetings.

At the 2016 Christian Science Camp Director’s meeting, the participants were briefed on the research and expressed interest in being involved as Adventure Unlimited begins to test activities.

Some individuals in focus groups shared their desire to see organizations work together to serve young adults. Some specific opportunities for collaboration that have been identified include:

• **The Principia**

  Principia has offered to support this young adult initiative, which may be useful for future activities or resources. The Principia alumni network and local Principia clubs are also valuable resources for networking with young adult Christian Scientists in local areas. Local young adult groups may want to engage with the local Prin club to see how they can share resources and collaborate.

• **The Albert Baker Fund**

  The Albert Baker Fund is working hard to expand its Career Alliance network, which is a valuable professional asset to all young adults who have a connection to Christian Science including A/U Ranches staff. Career Alliance career conferences and other planned career activities for young adults are also valuable resources for this demographic. Adventure Unlimited could help the Career Alliance promote career conferences in local cities across the country.

• **Asher Student Foundation**

  Asher Student Foundation has expressed interest in supporting the young adult initiative. The research showed that Asher Houses and their managers have been an invaluable resource in some areas to host events. Asher Houses will hopefully continue to play an important role in providing a space for young adult Christian Scientists to connect since many young adults don’t live in large homes or apartments where they can readily host a large group of people.

• **Camps for Christian Scientists**

  So far we have not specifically identified ways to work with other camps for this initiative. However, other camp facilities would provide a useful space and resource to host longer young adult activities (such as a national event). The camps could also help get the word out for local or regional activities for young adults.

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45 See Case Studies.
• **The Mother Church**

  TMC Youth’s goal is to inspire and support a commitment to church. Accordingly, they urged Adventure Unlimited and DiscoveryBound to think about how to support young adult engagement with church. Some questions to consider are: How can activities get young adults excited about church? How do organizations convey that church is more than an individual experience, but about supporting the greater community in prayer?

  Christian Science Organizations (CSOs) also provide a valuable opportunity for young adults to connect around church. Some individuals in focus groups who were members of CSOs invited other participants to join CSO activities. This was met with great interest.
CONCLUSION

The enthusiasm for more connection and engagement in this study is heartening. It suggests young adult Christian Scientists are willing to participate in activities that give them the opportunity to interact with one another and develop nurturing and authentic relationships. By networking with young adults and supporting the organizing of activities on the local level, as well as planning national activities for young adults, Adventure Unlimited will likely spur increased interaction and foster greater fellowship and spiritual growth. Hopefully, through consistent engagement and providing resources, networks, ideas, and encouragement, Adventure Unlimited will help individuals overcome some of the barriers preventing people from organizing group activity, such as limited time and the stigmas of “organization.”

Additionally, even though research participants expressed the most interest to participate in activities of a social nature, there were a multitude of activity ideas shared including events that have a more direct spiritual or service focus. This suggests Adventure Unlimited should encourage creativity and experimentation for how and why groups of young adults organize. Some communities may decide to focus on social activities that foster greater fellowship among young adults in the area whereas others may want to focus on exploring the meaning of church and how to make a significant impact on the community. Empowering these communities to organize in a way that best promotes their growth starts with making connections and setting a foundation for exploration and engagement.
APPENDIX 1.1 – RESEARCH METHODS

Interviews and Focus Groups

We held 71 individual interviews via phone, email, and Facebook, as well as 23 focus groups in 16 different locations around the country. The locations were chosen because they had relatively high concentrations of young adults within the target parameters. The focus group locations included:

- Denver, CO; Boulder, CO; Buena Vista, CO; St. Louis, MO; Elsah, IL; Los Angeles, CA; Laguna Niguel, CA; Austin, TX; Washington D.C.; Atlanta, GA; Jacksonville, FL; New York City, NY; Boston, MA; Portland, OR; Seattle, WA; San Francisco, CA; and Sacramento, CA.

Most of the focus groups were split by invested and divested audiences. However, five focus groups had a mix of invested and divested audiences in each discussion.

After joining a focus group, participants were asked to fill out a follow-up survey that was designed to supplement the feedback from focus groups. Sixty-six percent (98 people) of focus group attendees filled out the follow-up survey.

The following are some demographic statistics for people who took part in interviews and focus groups:

- 199 Total Individuals
- 74% Invested; 26% Divested
- 73% Single; 27% Married
- 7% Had Children; 93% Didn’t Have Children
- 5% Age 18-21; 50% Age 22-27; 42% Age 28-35; 3% Age Unknown

Follow-Up Focus Groups

After findings from interviews, focus groups, and the follow-up survey were written up, we gave the findings to three groups of people from across the country that attended a focus group (two invested groups and one divested) and asked these individuals to answer the following questions:

- What are the most significant findings to pay attention to?
- If Adventure Unlimited had an unlimited budget, human resources, and political will to do whatever it wanted, what are three immediate steps that it could take to be of service to young adults?
- Now consider that Adventure Unlimited has devoted some money and resources to serve young adults, but is working within resource constraints. What could the organization do with the above three steps?
- Taking one idea, how should Adventure Unlimited implement it considering:
  - Steps the organization needs to take
  - Resources needed

46 See Appendix 3.1 for follow-up survey questions and results.
The young adult research consultant met with each of these groups and answered the above questions. The purpose of this was to bring together a group of young adult stakeholders who expressed considerable interest in the research and let them make recommendations. Their suggestions shaped our recommendations to Adventure Unlimited.

**Final Survey**

In order to confirm findings from focus groups and provide more clarity on certain topics, we created and delivered a survey to 3,358 young adults within the target demographic. The Albert Baker Fund, Asher Student Foundation, and The Principia partnered with Adventure Unlimited to send this survey and provided lists of young adults within their database.

The fourth question on the survey asked participants whether it is important to them that their spiritual community is with other Christian Scientists. Respondents who answered in the affirmative were subsequently asked different questions than respondents who answered in the negative or said the question did not apply to them. The intent was to separate respondents who considered themselves invested and divested and provide them with appropriate questions. The results showed that of the 175 people who indicated they were invested, 19% said it wasn't important that their spiritual community was with other Christian Scientists. This reveals that this fourth question did not separate everybody as purely into invested and divested groups.

While data from the surveys provide useful insights into these topics being explored in this research, they may not be representative of the larger population of young adults who have a connection to Christian Science. This is partly due the fact that the response rate was not high enough to be confident the survey results would be relatively the same every time the survey was conducted.

The following are some demographic statistics for people to took part in the final survey:

- 281 people responded
- 63% Invested; 12% Divested; 25% Unknown
- 53% Single; 37% Married; 2% Other; 8% Unknown
- 15% Had Children; 77% Didn't Have Children; 8% Unknown
- 5% Under Age 20; 25% Age 20-24; 30% Age 25-29; 23% Age 30-34; 9% Age 35+; 8% Unknown
- 16% were enrolled in a college or graduate program; 2% were not focusing on career; 19% were search for what they want to do as a career; 23% were just getting started on their desired career path; 39% felt somewhat established on their desired career path

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47 See Appendix 3.2 for final survey questions and results.
Focus Group Questions

Invested Focus Group – Primary Questions

1. What are some things that you like about the Christian Science communities you have been a part of?
   » What do you look for in a Christian Science community?

2. As a young adult Christian Scientist, are there things you feel you are looking for more of in your life?
   » If yes – Can organizations provide for any of these things? In what ways?

3. Do you have a desire to connect with other young adult Christian Scientists?
   » If yes – In what ways do you want to connect with other young adult Christian Scientists?
   » If yes – In what ways can organizations support these connections?
   » If yes – What kinds of activities or programs would you find valuable and attractive?
   » If no – Why don’t you have a desire to connect with other young adult Christian Scientists?

4. In your view, what role should organizations play in serving young adult Christian Scientists?

5. What are some reasons you might not participate in activities or programming created by an organization like Adventure Unlimited?

6. Are there things that you dislike about the Christian Science communities you have been a part of?

7. What are some ways that organizations can proactively work to overcome some of the things you don’t like about Christian Science communities?

8. What are the best ways that organizations like Adventure Unlimited can nurture your spiritual growth?

Invested Focus Group – Secondary Questions

1. To participate in any young adult or adult activity or program, Adventure Unlimited has participants sign a statement of understanding assuring that they will adhere to certain community standards for the duration of the activity or program. Included in these, we require participants to not possess or use tobacco, alcohol, or illegal drugs, and partake in sexual relations outside of marriage. In your mind, are these standards important to have at Adventure Unlimited programs? Do they make people feel like they can’t participate, even though the standards only apply during the program?

2. Adventure Unlimited is not church, but is there anything that the organization can be doing to inspire your engagement with church?

3. Would you want to participate in activities that are open to anyone, including those who consider themselves uncertain or no longer active with Christian Science?
Divested Focus Group – Primary Questions

1. What are some things that you like about Christian Science, as a religion?

2. What are some things that you like about Christian Science communities?
   » What do you look for in a religious or spiritual community?

3. What do you dislike about either the Christian Science faith or CS communities?

4. What are some ways that organizations can proactively work to overcome some of the things you don't like about Christian Science communities?

5. Do you still want to be connected with any of the organizations you have been a part of?
   » If yes – How do you want to be connected?

6. If you were invited to participate in an A/U Ranches’ program or DiscoveryBound activity right now, would you feel comfortable participating?
   » If no – what makes you uncomfortable? What would make you feel like you could participate?
   » If yes – why do you feel comfortable?

Divested Focus Group – Secondary Questions

1. To participate in any young adult or adult activity or program, Adventure Unlimited has participants sign a statement of understanding assuring that they will adhere to certain community standards for the duration of the activity or program. Included in these, we require participants to not possess or use tobacco, alcohol, or illegal drugs, and partake in sexual relations outside of marriage. In your mind, are these standards important to have at Adventure Unlimited programs? Do they make people feel like they can't participate, even though the standards only apply during the program?

2. Are organizations sending a message of inclusivity? Should organizations be changing how they communicate?

3. Adventure Unlimited is not church, but is there anything that the organization can be doing to inspire your engagement with church?
APPENDIX 1.2 – DEMOGRAPHIC SUBSETS AND TRENDS

This research encompassed a broad demographic of young adults. It generally included young adults ages 18-35 who have a connection to Christian Science. Participants were asked to self-identify as actively engaged with Christian Science community (which we refer to as invested in Christian Science community) or as uncertain or no longer engaged with Christian Science communities (which we refer to as divested from Christian Science community). Some divested individuals considered themselves Christian Scientists but weren’t actively engaged in Christian Science community.

Overall, 68% of research participants considered themselves invested, 18% divested, and 14% are unknown.

Invested and Divested

The following are ways that research participants would likely classify themselves in regards to their interest in engagement with Christian Science and other young adult Christian Scientists, and their relationship with organizations. Most participants fall into one of these categories with slight variations.

1. I am an active Christian Scientist who regularly attends church. I relish opportunities to interact with other young Christian Scientists who are in a similar stage of life as me. I value these connections because we have a common background in Christian Science and can use each other as a resource to learn more about how to apply Christian Science as I work through challenges. I would enjoy doing more social activities with other Christian Scientists, as well as more spiritually-centered activities, like discussions or Bible study, or purpose-driven activity, like community service. It would also be fun to organize activity around church—maybe lunch or dinner around services. I don’t necessarily think that social activity has to be only for Christian Scientists though; others should feel free to come and participate as well.

2. I am an active Christian Scientist who regularly attends church. I don’t have a strong desire to interact with other Christian Scientists outside of church. I don’t usually find we have much in common and I already have my own friends. Social interaction with other Christian Scientists just because we are Christian Scientists feels forced. Plus, I think our purpose as Christian Scientists is to branch out and be social and practice Christian Science outside of our religious bubble. I would be interested in doing activities with other Christian Scientists that have a common purpose beyond just social connection – like church work or community service. I may be interested in more spiritually-centered activity, like sponsored talks or some discussions.

3. I am an active Christian Scientist who rarely attends church. I love the teachings of Christian Science and strive to live and practice them every day, however, I do not feel an affinity with traditional churches. I feel that Christian Science is an individual journey and I don’t feel inspired in church or by some of the social norms of traditional Christian Science communities that are somewhat insular and require you to fit into a certain mold to participate. While I am wary of traditional Christian Science communities, I would be interested in more interaction with other young Christian Scientists, particularly through spiritually-centered activities, like discussions or Bible study, or purpose-driven activities, like community service. I’d think twice before attending an activity branded by a Christian Science organization.

4. I grew up in Christian Science, but no longer consider myself a Christian Scientist. However, I am spiritual and may or may not attend another church of a different denomination. I really value what Christian Science gave me, both in terms of the values and critical thinking it fostered, as well as camp experiences, Principia, or DiscoveryBound. My strongest and closest friends came from these communities growing up. I do feel connected with the Christian Science organizations that I grew up in and would be open to activities put
together by these organizations, as long as they are not Christian Science focused. Some of these might include outdoor adventure or expeditions, purpose-driven activities like community service, social justice or other engagement, and possibly spiritually-centered activity that has more of an interfaith style to it—like discussions, Bible study, etc. I would also take advantage of career services if they were available. I am sometimes wary of activity branded by Christian Science organizations.

5. I grew up in Christian Science but no longer consider myself a Christian Scientist. I don’t have an interest in staying connected with Christian Science organizations. I may have valued some of my experiences growing up, like camp, but I have been turned off by Christian Science communities or don’t believe in Christian Science teachings. I avoid Christian Science communities and won’t be participating in any activity.

Age and Life Experience

Furthermore, focus groups suggested that life experience is a better indicator of the type of programs, activities, and resources young adults are interested in than age. In particular, young adults who are single or married without kids have more in common with each other than young adults who are married with kids. It seemed that parents are more interested in participating in traditionally organized activities because it gives them a break from parenting. They look for activities that are kid friendly and supportive of parents. Focus groups also suggested that parents have less spare time than young adults who don’t have kids and are less likely to plan activities.

The final survey also showed some significant trends when respondents were divided into demographic categories of married, single, have children, and don’t have children. As a whole, survey respondents indicated that they are most looking for outdoor adventure, like-minded social community, and opportunities for spiritual exploration and/or study. However, separating the respondents to these demographic subsets shows the top three things that each group is looking for most (in order of popularity):

- **Married:** Church community, outdoor adventure, opportunities for spiritual exploration and/or study.
- **Single:** Outdoor adventure, like-minded social community, career networking and/or professional development.
- **Have Children:** Church community, like-minded social community, opportunities for spiritual exploration and/or study, spiritual community.
- **Don’t Have Children:** Outdoor Adventure, like-minded social community, opportunities for spiritual exploration and/or study.

This shows that people in different stages of experience are looking for different things in their life. Young adults who are single also indicated that they are looking for engagement with social and/or environmental justice issues substantially more than young adults who are married.

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48 Note: not enough people with children responded to the survey to identify statistically significant trends between young adults who have children and young adults who don’t. Therefore, the survey showed more statistically significant trends between respondents who were married and single.

49 See Appendix 3.2.

50 Respondents who are married are looking for church community significantly more than respondents who are single.

51 Respondents who are single are looking for career networking and/or professional development significantly more than respondents who are married.

52 Opportunities for spiritual exploration and/or study and spiritual community are tied for popularity.
Additionally, there were marked differences in the top five activities that the subgroups are most interested in participating in:\(^{53}\)

- **Married**: Local social activities, weekend vacation, weekend spiritual summit, weekend at camp, topical in-person spiritual discussions.

- **Single**: Local social activities, adventure trip, weekend vacation, weekend at camp, weekend spiritual summit, volunteer trip.\(^{54}\)

- **Have Children**: Local social activities, weekend vacation, topical in-person spiritual discussions, fellowship activities around church services, weekend at camp.

- **Don’t Have Children**: Local social activities, adventure trip, weekend vacation, weekend at camp, weekend spiritual summit.\(^{55}\)

Respondents who are married and have children are more interested in activities that have greater spiritual substance, such as topical in-person spiritual discussions, spiritual summits, and fellowship activities around church. Young adults who are married are also substantially more interested in participating in a bible study than young adults who are single.

A couple of other significant differences between these demographic subsets include:

- Young adults who are married identify with the statement “I enjoy being in an environment free from alcohol, tobacco, and/or drugs” substantially more than young adults who are single.

- Young adults who are single attend church less regularly and study Christian Science less consistently than married young adults.

Additionally, there were some significant trends based on age group that stood out on the survey:\(^{56}\)

- Not surprisingly, as young adults get older they feel more established in their career. There were substantially more respondents ages 20-24 who were just getting started on their desired career path or searching for what they want to do as a career than respondents ages 25-29 and 30-34. Respondents ages 30-34 were the most likely to feel somewhat established on their desired career path. As a result, there was a significant increase in the number of respondents ages 20-29 who indicated that they are looking for career networking and/or professional development opportunities.

- Focus groups suggested individuals in their late 20s and early 30s have more disposable income. However, on the survey each age group was generally willing to pay the same amount of money to attend a long weekend activity.

\(^{53}\) See Appendix 3.2.

\(^{54}\) Weekend spiritual summit and volunteer trip were tied.

\(^{55}\) Young adults who don’t have children are significantly more interested in an adventure trip than people who do have children.

\(^{56}\) Note: not enough people under the age of 20 and 35+ responded to the survey to identify statistically significant trends with the other age groups (20-24, 25-29, and 30-34).
APPENDIX 2.1 – INGREDIENTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL ACTIVITY

How young adults want their activities to be:

• Fulfilling
• Relevant to a young adult’s goals
• People with common goals and life experience
• Clearly communicated purpose
• Low commitment
• Organic, informal, natural feeling
• Safe and non-judgmental
• No hidden agendas or expectations (like getting someone to come to church)
• Strong Christian Science focus vs. don’t have strong Christian Science focus
• Inclusive
• Promote teamsmanship / striving together
• Require little to no “red tape” to set up
• Fit into a lifestyle desired by many Christian Scientists (no alcohol, drugs, tobacco)
• Have child care available (for parents to participate)
• Have food present

Why young adults might be more likely to attend an activity:

• They know someone else attending.
• Somebody personally invites them.
• Activities happen consistently.
• There is enough notice before an activity takes place.
• The purpose is clearly communicated and aligns with a young adult’s interests.
• It’s communicated that everybody is included.

57 Some people want activity that has a strong spiritual focus and others want activity that is more social in nature.
58 This comment was made a couple of times in regards to a Tough Mudder activity that was part of a DiscoveryBound event. Participants enjoyed the team feeling with other young adult Christian Scientists in this activity.
59 Events should be simple to put together.
60 Some young adults care about having an environment regulated in this way. Others don’t mind participating in an activity regulated in this way but don’t like the perception that people who do drink alcohol or bad people or not as spiritual as those who choose not to drink. Furthermore, there are others who don’t think it is necessary to have this type of regulated environment.
• It’s low commitment.
• It’s low cost.

**How activities are more likely to be planned:**

• There is a paid staff member who is responsible for networking, developing local communities, and supporting activities.
• There are leaders in the community willing to spearhead activity.
• Interest in a certain activity already exists.\(^\text{61}\)
• There is a collaborative community.

\(^{61}\text{This is one of the reasons why it is valuable to let young adults plan their own activities; they are already interested.}\)
APPENDIX 2.2 – HOW TO MAKE ACTIVITIES FEEL ORGANIC AND AUTHENTIC

Focus group participants often talked about wanting activities to be “organic.” The term “organic” is generally used to refer to an event that is peer-led. Focus group participants shared that organic activities feel more home-grown, personal, casual, genuine, and like a natural fellowship between friends. Organic activity was talked about as the antithesis of “structured activity,” which was often described as being rigid, contrived, inauthentic, or impersonal.

At face value, it seemed that focus group participants, and young adults in general, are disinterested in organization and structure. And to some extent, something that feels intensely organized or structured was seen as a deterrent for young adults. However, focus group participants acknowledged that structure is an essential element in even organic activity in order to bring people together to one spot.

A closer look at the research seemed to reveal that ultimately young adults want interaction that feels sincere and intimate. This is sometimes challenging to achieve because developing close relationships requires time, effort, and regularity of engagement. Even in a so-called “organic” activity that is put together by a local community member, if young adults in the area are not well acquainted with each other, some may be deterred from participating because they don’t know other people attending.

The question then is, are there ways to make an activity feel more organic? Focus groups helped identify some strategies to achieve this goal.

All Activity

• It is best if an activity is put together by one or more individuals in the community as opposed to an organization. These individuals often already have established ties with the community which makes it feel more authentic. Organizations can provide support in the background.

• Individually reach out to people inviting them to participate. Sending personal emails, making phone calls, or talking to people face to face feels more sincere than just sending out an email blast. Personal connections are key.

• Make activity organization as easy as possible. Having lots of forms to fill out or hoops to jump through in order to receive support from an organization is unattractive to organizers.

• Use social media as much as possible. Creating Facebook events allows individuals to see who else is interested in or planning to come to an activity.

Local Activity Only

• Hold regular events. This helps build relationships within the community.

• Hold simple events that are low commitment and low cost. This models what young adults would do with their friends anyways. However, subsidized activities that cost more money (such as a sports game) are also attractive.

62 See Organizing Activities.

63 In the absence of having a local individual to plan an activity, Adventure Unlimited can use the rest of the strategies in this section to make the activity feel more organic.
Regional or National Activity Only

- Balance structured activity with unstructured time. Young adults just like to “hang out.” But they also like to have options for activities.

- Use an invitation (such as Eventbrite) where people can see who else is planning to attend. It can be helpful to get a couple of people to commit to coming before releasing the invitation so that there are already people planning to attend.
APPENDIX 2.3 – PROVEN STRATEGIES FOR PLANNING LOCAL ACTIVITY

1. **Launch a communication platform**

   The Affinity Groups in New England and the Front Range and the Austin DB 20s/30s chapter used Facebook and email to communicate with members of the community. The New England Affinity Group sent out an email to a list of people in the area, introducing the idea of an Affinity Group, asking recipients to confirm that they want to continue to receive emails, and asking for additional names and contact info for other people in the area. The email list was the primary form of communication for the New England Affinity Group.

   The group also took great care to consistently communicate with its members. A couple of emails were sent before an event and an email was always sent after an event, ideally with photos that were taken. This creates what David called a “rudimentary sense of community” so that people would feel connected to that activity and the group. Each email comes from an individual person (the email is sent from affinitynewengland@gmail.com but is always signed by an individual person) which helps make the group feel community-driven.

   The Front Range Affinity Group and Austin DB 20s/30s chapter have found Facebook to be the most effective means of communication. While the group continues to use email to send event invitations (primarily to reach people on the email list who have not joined the Facebook group), Facebook has facilitated communication between a core group of people who consistently have attended the activities. It is also a great place to post pictures and share ideas.

2. **Create the first event**

   There should be some build-up for the first event. The New England Affinity Group’s emails introducing the Affinity group were sent out a month and a half before the first event to create some anticipation. Then, an email invitation announcing the first event (Cosmic Bowling Night) was sent out two weeks before the activity. David felt that two weeks was enough notice because this event was simple and low commitment.

   The Front Range Affinity Group (before it was named the Front Range Affinity Group) partnered with a local church to organize a larger event that involved a talk by two Christian Science lecturers, lunch, and a discussion. There was more planning for this event and a little more lead time for advertising (at least a month). This event attracted a larger number of people than any of the smaller events hosted by the Affinity Group and was a great way to build some initial connections.

3. **Post events**

   Each young adult group has found it important to have a transparent platform for people to see who is attending upcoming events. The New England Affinity Group used evite.com and the Front Range Affinity Group and Austin DB 20s/30s used Facebook events. One way to show that people are coming to the event is to get a few people to commit to attending before the event has been posted. People are almost always more attracted to an event that has more people attending and/or people they know.

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64 The leader of the New England Affinity Group.
4. Establish consistency

The goal of both Affinity Groups has been to create a community of people that self-organize around activities. This means that multiple people have to participate to put together activities in order for the group to be sustainable. Neither group has achieved this goal.

David was successful in asking other individuals to plan activities. However, without his prodding, engagement slowed. The Front Range Affinity Group and Austin DB 20s/30s have relied heavily on one or two people to spearhead activities. The research consultant has heard interest from others to plan activities, but hasn’t seen anyone step up on their own.

Some ideas about how to encourage greater consistency in group engagement include:

- Create a schedule – establish a time that the group meets every month or couple months (e.g. first Fridays or the last weekend every month).
- Send out a Facebook poll – see how often people want to meet, what times work best for people, and what types of activities the group wants to participate in.
- Get commitments at the beginning – ask who would be willing to help create events at the first couple of activities.
APPENDIX 2.4 – ACTIVITY IDEAS

Social Activity
• Professional sports games
• Free city activities (zoo, museums, etc.)
• Lunch or ice cream after church
• Holiday party
• Outdoor adventure activity (hiking, biking, canoeing, skiing, etc.)
• Dancing
• Ice skating
• Team sports (capture the flag, soccer, ultimate Frisbee, etc.)
• Tough Mudder65
• Dinner potluck
• Board game night
• Guys / girls night

Spiritual Activities and Resources
• Q & A with practitioner
• Facebook live talk / discussion with practitioner or lecturer
• Young adult-focused talks
• Bible study groups (organizations could provide bible study resources)
• Young adult Sunday school
• Group lesson reading
• Discussion / conversation around specific topics (organizations could provide discussion topics)
• Online discussion forum
• Monitor forum hosted by churches
• Advice forums offering suggestions for challenges that young adults confront
• Toolkits for teaching Sunday school / Sunday school workshops

65 This was a well-liked DiscoveryBound activity. Multiple focus group participants expressed that they liked it because it pushed their physical and mental limits, and they had a group of Christian Scientists to rely on when it got challenging.
**Career Activity**

- Career skills workshops
- Career fair
- Professional “hackathons” (people from similar professions get together to collaborate)

**Regional and National Activity Ideas**

- Weekend spiritual summits (kind of like what TMC Youth has done)
- Regional DiscoveryBound activities
- Lifelong learning trips for young adults (like Principia’s lifelong learning)
- International travel
- Adventure trip
APPENDIX 3.1 – SURVEY RESULTS

If you would like to see the full “Focus Group Follow-up Survey Results” or “Final Survey Results” please email: audbcommunity@adventureunlimited.org