

Serving Young Adult Christian Scientists

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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.

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 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).¹ 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 closeness 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

¹ See *Appendix 1.2* for more about what "organic activity" means.

what is right and wrong and this, among other things,² 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.³ 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.

² See *Constructive Criticism of Christian Science Communities*.

³ Ibid.

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*,⁴ 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).

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.

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.

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”)⁵, many research participants indicated experiences that nurture spiritual learning including:

4 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.

5 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.

- 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.⁶

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.

Organizing Activities

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.

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.

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:

⁶ 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.

- 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 survey results show 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.

Case Studies

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.⁷ In 2008, Stephanie led the initiative and did much of the 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

⁷ The role of the board and the Affinity Group is outlined in the [Affinity Board Handbook](#).

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.

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.

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.⁸ The other activities have been focused on fun and fellowship.⁹ 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.
- 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.

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

⁸ They organized an “Operation Testimony Meeting” where a group of young adults went to a Wednesday testimony meeting together.

⁹ Some activities included: Olympics opening ceremony party, pumpkin carving, Christmas cookie exchange.

- 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.¹⁰
- 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.

¹⁰ 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 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.

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.

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.

The survey revealed the top resources respondents thought would be useful for helping them engage with other young adult Christian Scientists.¹¹ 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.¹² Adventure Unlimited could also host conversations via phone or teleconference.
- Plan occasional local DiscoveryBound activities to provide a space for young adults to connect and encourage them to continue interacting.

11. 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.

12. This was inspired by our focus groups. We received positive feedback on our focus group discussions and many participants expressed a desire to continue to have these types of conversations.

- 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.¹³

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.
- 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.

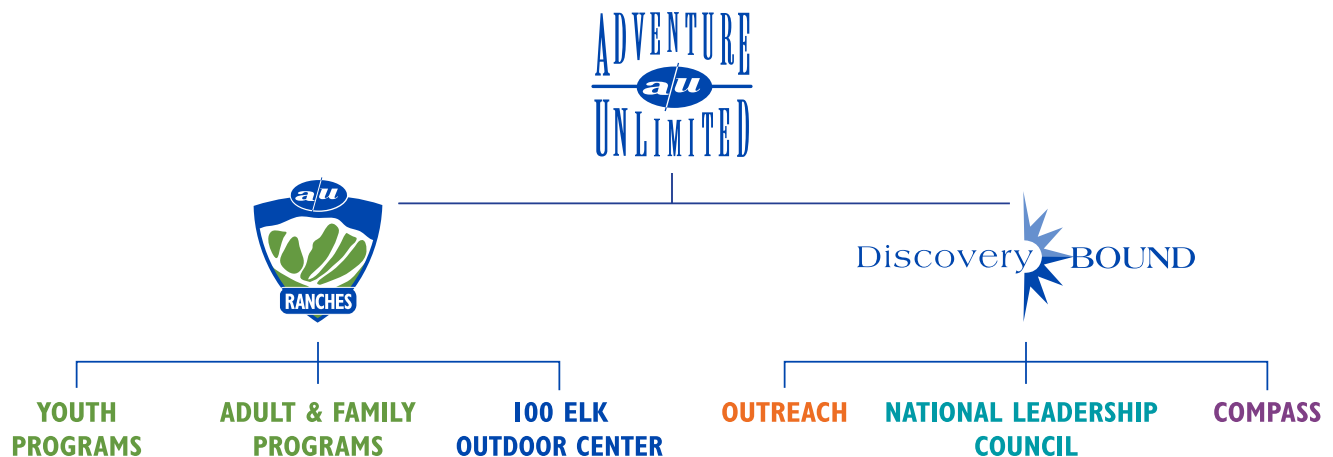
¹³ Found in *Appendix 1.1* and *1.3* as well as *Case Studies*.

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.

READ THE FULL REPORT

If you would like to read the full “Making Connections” report, you can download it from AdventureUnlimited.org/ya-research or contact audbcommunity@adventureunlimited.org.



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 focus¹⁴
- Inclusive
- Promote teammanship / striving together¹⁵
- Require little to no "red tape" to set up¹⁶
- Fit into a lifestyle desired by many Christian Scientists (no alcohol, drugs, tobacco)¹⁷
- 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.

¹⁴ Some people want activity that has a strong spiritual focus and others want activity that is more social in nature.

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ Events should be simple to put together.

¹⁷ 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.¹⁸
- There is a collaborative community.

¹⁸ This is one of the reasons why it is valuable to let young adults plan their own activities; they are already interested.

Focus group participants often talked about wanting activities to be “organic.”¹⁹ 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.²⁰
- 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.

¹⁹ See *Organizing Activities*.

²⁰ 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.

1. Launch a communication platform

The Affinity Groups in New England 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 David²¹ 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 Austin DB 20s/30s chapter has 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.

Another 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](https://www.evite.com) and the 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.

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.

²¹ The leader of the New England Affinity Group.

David was successful in asking other individuals to plan activities. However, without his prodding, engagement slowed. The Austin DB 20s/30s has 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.

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 Mudder²²
- 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

²²This 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