



VBS
Training Series

FIVE STEPS

To Plan VBS Through
COVID-19

Concordia
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YOUR PARTNER IN MINISTRY

Introduction

Pause, breathe and rethink. You've still got this!

God has called us for such a time as this. Right now, the kids in your church need fun, life and connection. It's essential that in this season the church steps up and serves as a light for families.

With that in mind, more than ever before, this is the summer that the church needs VBS. Don't quit or give up hope on your summer VBS plans. Just because we are staying home due to COVID-19, doesn't mean that ministry or our planning should stop. It's safe to say, due to the current world events, VBS will likely look different this summer. But it is so important for you to offer it to your church families to keep hope alive and to create excitement. If VBS doesn't work with your originally scheduled dates or plans, we urge you to think creative instead of cancelled.

Come July and August our kids will be over screen time, homeschooling will be gone for summer break, parents will be weary and all of us will be ready for face to face interactions after social distancing. In our current world so much can change in 30 days, let alone one day. But there soon will be a day when things start changing for the better and we need to be prepared for it.

Right now none of us has every answer, the Concordia Supply team included. Our team, much like you, is continually in process and sorting through the ever changing information. Through it all, we are here for you, to encourage you, to share our heart for VBS and to affirm that no matter how VBS looks this year, you are going to make an incredible impact on the Kingdom.

We are all in this together.

If at any point in time you feel stuck and are looking for direction, please reach out to our team by emailing us at info@concordiasupply.com. We would be happy to schedule a call with you.

Over the next five weeks we are committed to partnering with you through this new VBS planning process. We have been scouring the web, talking with the best VBS publishers and chatting with brilliant VBS directors about what's next. We have taken everything we've learned and have broken them down into five VBS bite-sized planning milestones.

Ready to get started? Let's plan your best VBS yet.



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Step One

BRAINSTORM PLAN A, PLAN B AND PLAN C

By now, we're sure that Zoom, FaceTime and the like have become quite familiar to you. Fire up your video conference app of choice and set up a meeting with your core VBS team. The objective of your meeting is to develop three plans - A, B and C.

PLAN A

How will we plan VBS if life is normal and we get to host a *traditional face to face* VBS

PLAN B

How will we plan VBS if we are only able to gather in *limited groups* of 10, 25 etc.

PLAN C

How will we plan VBS if we are still under *stay-at-home quarantine* orders

We have learned of a few really creative and thoughtful ideas from the web, talking with the best VBS publishers and chatting with brilliant VBS directors. Below are a collection of some of their ideas to get the conversation going with your team. Remember, think creative!

Plan A

How will we plan VBS if life is normal and we get to host a traditional face to face VBS

- **Our heart is for face to face VBS if at all possible.** The in-person connection and relationship building is what VBS is all about. Kids will be hungry and ready for it!
- **You should have up to three potential dates for a face to face VBS.** Include your regularly scheduled date, and then consider two other weeks later in summer (July or August) that you could host VBS. Make sure to consider other events scheduled on your church calendar. Don't forget to reserve all of your tentative dates on your church's master calendar, just in case. Lastly, know when your decision day is for each date. Meaning, if you know you will need six weeks for final preparations and plans for VBS and your date is tentatively scheduled for July 20th-24th, then you know if the quarantine hasn't lifted by June 8th, you will have to move to Plan B or Plan C.
- **Consider scheduling your VBS as a back to school kick-off event.** Schedule your VBS for a week or two before schools start back up for the Fall. This could be a great way to introduce your kids to their new KidMin leader for the year and gives your team plenty of time to plan and for the COVID-19 restrictions to pass.



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STEP ONE CONTINUED: BRAINSTORM PLAN A, PLAN B AND PLAN C

Plan B

How will we plan VBS if we are only able to gather in limited groups of 10, 25 etc.

- **Consider turning your VBS into a Front Yard Club.** You can schedule small groups of kids and leaders to host VBS on the front lawn of a few church families.
- **Consider modifying your program to a one, two or three day program.** With a reduced schedule you can do a series of Mini VBS's back to back over one or two weeks. From there, schedule a limited group of kids for each Mini VBS session so that you are under the allowed maximum capacity of group size.

Plan C

Virtual VBS (VBS At-home)

- **Plan on hosting a Virtual Bible School** by either live streaming, using Facebook Live or pre-recording your program. Determine what materials your families will need to pick up from you so they can facilitate VBS at home. Suggestions specifically for Group VBS programs are student books, Bible Memory Makers, Buddies, Imagination Station at home sticker sheets and all Imagination Station experiment items. For all programs we suggest having music, craft packs, mission project materials, small group materials and shirts. To distribute your "At-Home Packs" you can organize a drive through pick-up for families at your church or have your leaders deliver them to their kids homes.
- **Take time to look through games, crafts and small group activities** so you can start to figure out what can be simplified, what can be done with items you already have and what can be done at home.
- **Plan on utilizing Zoom or something similar** to facilitate small group time in your program. Kids will love getting to interact with their friends and leaders.
- **Plan on streaming or recording Bible Stories and Worship.**
- **Take time to put together a daily schedule** and instructions for parents to follow as they help facilitate Virtual VBS. Maybe even consider getting shirts for each parent as an honorary crew leader!
- One of our VBS directors, Julie, posted her church's modified programming for Virtual VBS:

We plan on condensing everything. We plan on starting with the theme song, then will move to Bible Buddies Stories, Imagination Station, Bible Story and end in closing with another song. We plan on only decorating one area of the church and will use this area to film and record all of our programming. We are still planning on conducting registration. Everyone who is registered will get an "At-Home VBS" bag that will include Imagination Station science projects, Bible Buddies, Banduras, CD, DVD etc. Our "At-Home VBS" bags will be given to families the week before VBS so families can prepare to do the projects with us and so the kids will have time to learn the songs.

You've still got this! Let's plan your best VBS yet.

Step Two

OVERCOME BUDGET CHALLENGES

Now that you have Plan A, B and C mapped out you are ready for step two in our planning process. With all your creative ideas in place we're sure your next logical question is ***"How will we pay for all of this?"***

Many churches have set a spending freeze on their budgets and VBS directors have expressed concerns that their budget could potentially be eliminated during this season. Church tithing, ministry budgets and cuts are all very real and valid concerns for anyone in ministry, especially VBS Directors.

Friends, do not be discouraged. No matter your budget size, big or small, your VBS is possible. Again, we want to emphasize that VBS likely will look different this year and even so, don't give up! The kids in your ministry need VBS, and so does your church.

All fears and concerns aside, let's roll up our sleeves and get to work. This week, knock out the following to-do's and consider the following ideas:

To-Do List

- **First, determine a rough budget for your Plan A, Plan B and Plan C.** Within each of these rough budgets, create three categories to organize your line items into: Must Have, Like to Have and Extras. Chances are, you already have a good idea of your Plan A budget since it's what you were working on prior to COVID-19. We recommend that you start by making your Plan A budget as thorough as possible so that you can easily modify it for your Plan B and Plan C Budgets.
- **Next, prepare a list of fundraising ideas to supplement your VBS budget.** Research virtual fundraising ideas online and ask your team to brainstorm a few ideas. Don't forget to consider the ideas listed below!
- **Finally, talk with your Pastor, Staff, Board or whoever makes financial decisions for your ministry.** Let them know that you and your team are motivated to continue moving forward with VBS and ask them how you can partner with them to develop a creative budget solution so you can accomplish your goals. Make sure to have your Plan A, Plan B, Plan C, Fundraising Ideas and Budgets ready to present. The conversation will be much more productive when you present ideas and solutions versus only coming to them with problems. This is where collaboration happens! Don't forget to remind your church leaders of the prime importance of VBS. It is the most powerful ministry event to attract and keep families involved in your church. Leaders know the financial importance of families with children. In addition to the spiritual investment, your VBS provides a practical investment in your church's future.



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STEP ONE CONTINUED: BRAINSTORM PLAN A, PLAN B AND PLAN C

Ideas For Your VBS Budget

- **Charge a registration fee.** Not everyone is a fan of this option, but we encourage you to be open minded and to consider charging a registration fee for your VBS. Those not in favor of this planning method raise concern over churches willing to charge for a gospel experience. We hear you! But remember again, we are experiencing something unprecedented in the church. You may have never considered charging a VBS registration fee before just like many of us have never considered hosting a Virtual VBS before! We are all in uncharted waters and trying new things outside of our comfort zone to innovate in our ministries.

On the topic of VBS registration fees, we spoke with Holly Hoopes, veteran VBS Director. Holly has been a Director at 38 consecutive VBS's! We asked Holly to share with us her insight on why they charge a registration fee:

Every year we host about 80 children for VBS. To put on VBS, it costs us about \$23 per student. We offset that cost by charging a \$15 registration fee per child. I look at it this way, if we took the cost head on and didn't offset any of our costs we would only be able to host 30 kids at our VBS. For us, charging a registration fee is worth it to reach 50 more kids for the Kingdom! We never want the registration cost to be a burden for our families, so we offer a registration fee scholarship for those who need it.

If you have not before asked families for a registration fee for VBS, this may be the year to consider it. Many families spend hundreds of dollars for summer camps. They understand the value of quality experiences for their children. Your VBS is a top-quality spiritual experience.

- **Invite a few major donors to step forward and provide a special gift to make VBS happen in this critical year.** Every congregation has people who are ready to respond to a compelling need. Approach them individually. Explain the need. Share your dream of how children will be transformed by God's love.
- **Launch a virtual fundraising campaign.** Set up a GoFundMe or a Facebook Fundraiser and invite the kids in your ministry to write letters or emails to their family and friends for donations.
- **Organize a flower sale.** Spring is here and anyone would enjoy bringing some fresh bright flowers into our quarantined homes. Selling flowers to your community is a quick and easy way to raise funds. Keep your costs low by working with a local florist to purchase flowers at a discounted bulk price. If you tell them why you're raising funds and mention the promotional benefits, they're more likely to work with you. You can sell flowers by the dozen or create custom bouquets with the flowers you buy. You can sell them online and arrange for contactless delivery or pick-up of your fresh blooms. This fundraising idea has the added benefit of blessing a small business in your community. Every little bit helps!
- **See if your church is taking advantage of any government assistance to cover the shortfall for payroll and rent.** The bills passed by congress may be easing the burden and covering any gaps. That may free up more resources than anticipated.

**There are hundreds of ideas out there, these are just a few to get you started.
Share your creative ideas with us on our VBS Director's Facebook Group.
[Join us online for inspiration and community here.](#)**

Step Three

ENGAGE YOUR TEAM

You've knocked down two major planning milestones - way to go! Now you're ready for step three. Hopefully by this point in time you have been able to nail down key details, decisions and plans.

With your roadmap in place it's time to engage your team even further. Now more than ever people are looking for opportunities to exercise their purpose. People want to be asked to do something significant. This is an amazing opportunity for you to lean into people, instill in them a deeper vision for VBS and to ask them to help you figure this out.

This week, schedule a virtual team meeting. Set two objectives for this meeting: the first, to delegate and empower your team. And the second, is to care for them.

When you meet, ask your team:

- How can we step up and be a powerful presence for our community through VBS?
- What do we need to accomplish in the next week? Next two weeks? Next month?
- Who will take point on fundraising?
- Does everyone have a clear list of action items?
- How are you doing?
- How have you been adjusting to home quarantine?
- How have you been adjusting to working from home?
- How have you been adjusting to homeschooling?
- What's going on in your family life?
- Has God been teaching you anything new in this season?
- Is there something I can be praying for you during this time?

Just because we are staying at home due to COVID-19 doesn't mean that ministry or our lives have to stop. And yes, while the planning is important, it's not more important than the people who make it all possible. You should be caring for your VBS team more than ever. Everyone is affected. As a leader, please care for your team.

Love well this week and happy planning!

Step Four

COMMUNICATE WITH FAMILIES AND VOLUNTEERS

At this point, you have done a lot of heavy lifting behind the scenes to get all your ducks in a row. This week's planning milestone is straightforward and very simple - communicate with families and volunteers in your ministry.

To clarify, you likely have been in frequent contact with your core VBS team, when we reference volunteers in this instance, we mean everyone in addition to your core team who serves with you.

No matter how you connect with parents and volunteers your goal should be to over communicate with them. Although you have done a lot of planning, strategizing and discussing you may still feel like you don't have all the answers. That's okay! Use this opportunity to share with them that you are working on Plan A, B and C.

There are many methods you can use to accomplish this milestone. To succeed in your goal of overcommunication, we recommend that you plan a small series of communication touch points. Take a look at our suggested communication plan below:

- **Send an email blast to all parents and volunteers.** Know that to all of your recipients, this email is a source of good news and joy to them! Your church family at this point is likely really missing each other and will be thrilled to hear from you. Use this message to communicate first that VBS is happening in one way or another! Next share your potential plans and how they can support you throughout your planning process.
- **Create a video that you can post to your church's social media.** Let people know that VBS is happening! Invite people to support you throughout your planning process through fundraising and/or prayer.
- **Pull up your contact list of all your families from last year's VBS and anyone new to your ministry this year.** Split up your list evenly between you and your key VBS leaders. Next, take time to make a personal call to each family on the list. This might sound like a lot of work, but it has a huge upside! First, imagine how touched these families will feel knowing you thought of them personally and took the time to connect with them. Second, this gives you an opportunity to communicate further the heart and vision of your VBS. You will be able to explain things more in depth in a person to person conversation than sometimes written communication will allow. Third, these calls are great research for your team. Make sure you all take time to document the questions and concerns families may raise during your calls. Families are going to have a great, fresh outside perspective and can help bring to light areas your team can focus on over the next few weeks. Plan on debriefing with your core team to talk through everything you learned from the calls. Lastly, make sure you pray with each family before you conclude your call. This is a great opportunity to minister. Enough said, right?
- **Make a list of five key prayer points for your VBS.** Next, plan on sending a daily message to your families and volunteers with one prayer point and a scripture. We all know, prayer changes things and the best way to engage your people in this time of social distancing is to pray together. You can distribute your daily prayer points in an email, text, or through social media.

No matter how you decide to craft your communication plan, we know everyone involved will be blessed by the joy, hope and excitement it creates in your ministry!

Step Five

GET KIDS EXCITED ABOUT VBS

You made it to step five! We hope you are feeling empowered, accomplished, hopeful and truly excited for what God is going to do through your 2020 VBS. This week's planning milestone is definitely the best part, it's time to get your kids excited about VBS!

Before you start, take a moment to put yourself in the shoes of your kiddos. In this season, kids have had so many things taken away - year end traditions, the school year with their classmates, field trips, sports and many other shaping experiences. Your message of fun and exciting VBS news is going to be just what they need at this time.

You are a VBS Director. Your gift is communicating with kids and creating programs and atmospheres that speak to them. We're sure you have been waiting to call these skills off the bench now that so much of the hard work is behind you. Get started with a few of these creative ideas:

- **Make a video from you specifically for the kids in your ministry.** Let them know that no matter what you are still going to do VBS even if it looks a little different this year.
- **As we've seen on social media, kids have been enjoying the lost art of snail mail.** Send custom postcards to your kids letting them know VBS is still coming and they are personally invited. See our full collection of professionally designed custom postcards here. Oh and don't forget, customizing is free!
- **Get your kids online with you.** Once a week host a FaceBook Live session or pre-record and send a worship sneak-peak to your kids. Each week you can release one VBS song with motions. Providing music early to kids gives them a chance to fall in love with each song and to learn the motions. Your worship sneak-peaks also provides parents with the opportunity to have a worship break with their kids in the middle of the day.
- Kim, a VBS Director from New Jersey, shared on our Facebook VBS Director's group a creative way she is getting her kids excited for VBS:

Wanted to share something we are doing in NJ. Since we are quarantined and closed, "Bear hunts" are popping up. Basically folks are putting stuffed bears in windows for kids to look for. We gave it a twist and put Sparky up in our church "window" along with a little VBS plug. We are planning via phone and text, etc, activities for our church windows [for kids and parents to participate in by driving or walking] by, especially with Easter coming. We have a lot of windows facing our [church] driveway!... Wanted to share [our] thinking outside the box moment.

We are all in this together. Get inspired by others and share how you are getting your kids excited for VBS on our [Facebook Director's Group](#).

