



## VBS Tips and Tricks from a Seasoned Veteran

### General VBS ideas to make this year the best one ever

- Gather your volunteers each morning before VBS for a short devotional, to pray, give daily updates, share the day's theme, encourage them, and celebrate the wins together. If it's in your budget, provide single-serve breakfast items to fuel them for the day ahead. (Ask local breakfast spots for a discount or donation, offering to promote their restaurant in a thank you post on social media.)
- Decorate a photo booth in your theme and ask families to tag your church on social media. This is a great place for your main stage characters to greet kids and sign t-shirts each day.
- Use our email templates to communicate to parents the wheelchair goal and who Free Wheelchair Mission is. Update families daily with fundraising tips, Vimeo links and your VBS Bible verse for kids to memorize. Emails can be written in advance with specific details filled in on that day.
- If you have a snack rotation, consider placing snack right after your Bible or Outreach/ Missions rotation. Use this time while kids are busy eating to have leaders guide conversations with questions that are either printed or on a screen. This is also a great time to have kids respond to your Gospel presentation by completing a response card with them circling one of four responses: "I prayed the prayer for the first time today," "I've already prayed," "I'm not ready to pray yet," or "I have some questions." At pickup, leaders can give parents a postcard-sized invite to the Celebration Station to kids who prayed for the first time.
- Instead of a craft rotation on the last day, consider a water day instead! Kids can wear swimsuits and sunscreen under their VBS shirts. Include water slides, water balloon toss, splash pads, squirt guns, and bubble machines.
- If your church is large, provide a separate K-1 group area for less-rowdy water fun.
- Consider a competition, dividing the worship center into Team Red and Team Blue, with daily updates about which team is ahead in fundraising. Get your Student Ministry staff involved as mascots for each color, pumping the kids up each morning. The winning team gets to pie the face of the other team (or slime, dunk, etc).
- The Sunday before VBS, have a pickup plan for parents to get their child's t-shirt and info packet before the week begins. This will help your first day go much smoother and will give kids a chance to "customize" their VBS shirt for even more fun.



### **Make it fun!**

- Create opportunities for leaders to have fun with their groups. Use daily themes like crazy hair day, backwards day, mustache day, hat day, etc. • Set aside budget (or find a generous host) for a post-VBS Friday pizza party for all student leaders. If Friday is your water day, allow the students to use the slides, etc. Most rental companies don't charge extra for a few more hours.
- Encourage leaders to amp up the energy and get their group united by wearing fun things related to the theme. Dollar Tree, Oriental Trading, Amazon, etc. are great resources for inexpensive team-building fun. Headbands, bandanas, plastic visors, temporary tattoos and hair color spray, and pom poms can make the week more fun. Leaders will love getting creative and helping their group stand out.

### **Trust me, your church NEEDS a Park and Play! (Don't worry-it's easy & you'll have fun!)**

- Park and Play is a way to engage with your community before VBS to build momentum, promote your event, and after VBS to have something to point families to.
- Think of Park and Play as a way to show your church is in your community, for your community.
- Promote with postcard-sized invites with Park and Play dates/times/locations on one side and your VBS info on the other. These can be given out at church, MOPS, Women's Bible studies, promoted on social media, etc.
- Make sure to print enough to bring to the scheduled Park and Plays, because as word spreads, more and more people will invite and attend.
- Here's the recipe for a successful Park and Play before VBS
  - Our tagline was, "You bring the kids, we'll bring the fun!"
  - Find a park in your community that has all the elements a parent would want for their kids: shade, sand, a play structure, clean, close bathrooms, a grass area, picnic tables and a safe play structure.
  - Bring everything you can afford to that a parent would want, but because you're thinking all the thoughts for them, they don't have to bring because you'll provide. Things like: Play-Doh, sidewalk chalk, bubble wands, jump ropes, face paint, extra crafts, lemonade, individual-size snacks, cold brew coffee for parents, Otter Pops, sunscreen, playground balls, foam rockets, etc. Consider renting a bounce house and a ball pit for younger kids to put in the shade.
  - Host Park and Play **for only 2 hours**, from 10am-12pm, during the cool part of the day, getting kids sleepy for nap time.



- If you can, hire a face painter and/or balloon artist. If that's not possible, buy a face painting kit online and ask a talented student to be your face painter.
- At the event, walk around and speak to other parents in the park, letting them know that you're from \_\_\_ Church and you're throwing a park takeover party. Invite them to VBS and tell them you have more events, and they're welcome to enjoy all the fun!
- Host three (or more) Park and Plays each summer, giving out invites to everyone in the park so they help spread the word for the next event. Same time, same park.
- If you have a playground on your church campus, consider hosting your final Park and Play at your church. This brings the community onto your campus and hopefully, into your ministry.
- Promote your last Park and Play to VBS families, pointing them to the next thing (which, in Children's Ministry, you should always be thinking about).
- At your last Park and Play, invite other family ministries to join you and promote fall Bible studies, Mops, etc.

### **Gather a VBS prayer team**

They can be useful to:

- pray for your staff and volunteers as you prep and plan VBS.
- pray over "I Believe" cards before your Gospel message
- pray over the "I Believe" cards after that indicate a child said yes to Jesus.
- walk the church campus in the morning, praying for safety, fun, and for kids to learn how much God loves them!

### **Use "I Believe" cards to capture kids' responses on your Gospel presentation day**

- Each child fills out a card with the help of the volunteers.
- Offer three choices. Each child circles only one choice:
  - 1. I've already said I believe
  - 2. I said I believe today
  - 3. I'm not ready to say I believe
- If you use a check-in system with printed stickers, have one extra printed sticker for each group. The volunteers will place each child's sticker on the back of the I Believe card for follow up from the Children's team. Otherwise, have leaders write kids' names on the back.
- Have a postcard-sized piece ready for any child that said, "I Believe," to let the parents know their child had a spiritual milestone at VBS. Include information about your baptism class to be held the next day.



### **Create an “I Believe” Celebration Station for kids who say yes to Jesus**

- As simple as an Easy Up with tables outside the worship center where everyone will be picking up kids. Or decorate and make the celebration more elaborate. Use balloons and have a photo backdrop for kids to stop with their parent and celebrate their decision to say yes to Jesus!
- Gift a Bible to each child who visits the booth with a parent. “Award Bibles” for kids are around \$5 each online. Another option is to approach a ministry on your campus (with your lead pastor’s blessing), to ask them to donate Bibles. Consider printing Avery labels with your church’s name inside and a space to write the name and date.

### **Honor your volunteers all week**

- If it’s in your budget, have a morning update devotional with breakfast to fuel their day.
- Schedule key staff members lead the devotional for that day, aligning the focus on each day’s theme.
- Consider asking a local restaurant or Chick-fil-A to sponsor food for your volunteers or at least give a discount for your order.
- Ask your local Chick-Fil-A if they can donate free meal coupon cards for your leaders to thank them for their incredible commitment to your program.
- Also consider asking Men’s ministry to BBQ for your Friday VBS celebration.
- Have a follow-up plan for asking new VBS leaders to join your Children’s Ministry team. Sometimes the best weekend volunteers come from unexpected places. Don’t hesitate to ask if they’d like to give it a try, even for just a few weeks.

### **Hold a Children’s Baptism Class immediately after VBS on Thursday and hold post-VBS baptisms on Friday or following your VBS celebration weekend service**

- Begin promoting the baptism class as you promote VBS.
- Ask parents to provide a sack lunch for themselves and their child to eat during the class. Require one parent to attend with their child. This important spiritual milestone needs to align with each family’s needs.
- Make sure to highlight that baptism is a decision the child should make and not something to pressure the child into.
- Show a short video (plenty of examples online) that explains what baptism is and isn’t. You may even capture the attention of the parents who might wish to be baptized as a family!
- Ask kids to wear their VBS shirt for the baptism.



### **Collaborate with other ministries within your church; ask big!**

- With the blessing of your leadership, ask for an opportunity in Bible studies, men's groups, small groups, etc., to share special VBS gift opportunities. Appeal for a general ask for gifts. (Example: 10 glue guns, 5 Hobby Lobby \$100 gift cards, etc.) Another idea is to build a VBS wish list on Amazon and provide a link to ministries and Bible studies, letting them provide as God leads them. This helps people know when the need has been met, but other needs that are yet to be fulfilled. People can share the list and send items directly to the church.
- Provide a list of items you need for VBS; craft items, snacks, breakfast items for your leaders, and ask for donations. This is also a great time to encourage adults to volunteer. Even if they think they're not good with kids, they could help prep crafts, assist with snacks, or join the prayer team. There's a place for everyone at VBS!

### **Plan a VBS celebration weekend in your worship services**

- Plan ahead with your Lead Pastor to celebrate in your weekend services; the lives changed through VBS; the kids who said "yes" to Jesus, the new families who were introduced to your church campus, the impact made in your Free Wheelchair Mission fundraising efforts.
- Show a recap video in your weekend celebration services. Families love to see that their efforts are appreciated and to watch their kids singing along with the music. In your email to parents, ask that kids wear VBS t-shirts to lead the congregation in a few songs with hand motions.
- Have a "big reveal" moment that highlights the success of your fundraising efforts.
- Collaborate with weekend worship leadership and encourage them to leave the stage decorations up for the weekend VBS celebration. Reveal the final amount of wheelchairs raised. Show a wrap of video or slideshow of your week to the congregation. Unveil next year's save the date.

### **Promote VBS 6 weeks before**

- As soon as you know your dates, let families know on social media.
- Use social media to count down to the day families can register.
- Ask your staff wear VBS t-shirts the first weekend registration is open.
- Consider an early bird discount which expires on a specific date to encourage early registration. This helps you plan and budget better.



- If your church has a school or preschool, be sure to promote to them as well. Coordinate with the principal or preschool director to communicate about VBS to parents through regularly scheduled emails, updates, and newsletters. Encourage them to promote VBS on their social media, too.
- Park and Play will be your best community promotion tool.
- Ask for a registration table on your church's patio. Use a few laptops for instant online registration for parents.

### **Fundraising Tips**

- Download, customize, and print our free Lemonade Stand posters. No matter how a kid is fundraising, the poster will help communicate where the funds are going.
- Have a wheelchair goal to encourage kids to work towards. Give daily updates in your main session to encourage participation.
- For an accurate count of the amount of wheelchairs your VBS raises, encourage families to give straight to the church, indicating it's for VBS. This is the easiest way for you to keep count of the amount of wheelchairs raised during the week.
- Consider creating a free fundraising page on our website. Ask your graphics dept. to create a QR code that lands on your fundraising page and print them on your lemonade stand posters.

### **Leaders and Volunteers**

- Hold a required leader training to set expectations, get everyone excited, and reveal insider info like crafts, theme days, etc. Let leaders know you value them by giving them info only a leader attending the training gets access to.
- Give out VBS t-shirts to leaders at the training.
- Work with your Student Ministry leaders to promote students volunteering at VBS.
- Use your Student Ministry staff as your mascots, wearing silly costumes or their team colors to hype kids up. Their involvement will keep your student leaders engaged. At the end of the week, the losing mascot gets slimed, a pie in the face, or dunked.
- Encourage leaders to email stories of what happened during the day to a designated staff member. This is a great resource for your daily VBS update emails. It's also a great way to report "wins" back to your lead pastor.
- If your budget allows, provide free childcare for parents who commit to volunteering all week. This is a great chance to hold a "mini VBS" for kids in childcare. Involve them by sectioning off a space for them to join in the main



session worship and fun. This is a great place for Student Leaders to volunteer if they love younger children.

- Also, if your budget allows, consider offering a discount on VBS registration or even free registration for adults who volunteer the entire week of VBS.

### **Retention Ideas**

- On the last day of VBS, invite families to one final Park and Play a week or more after VBS, keeping in mind your area's school schedule. Use leftover snacks, crafts, and recreation toys.
- Offer an incentive for new families to visit your church the weekend after for a VBS celebration - bring kids up front/on stage to lead congregation in 2 VBS songs with hand motions.
- Hold a family BBQ on the last night. Keep it simple with just burgers and hot dogs. Ask your men's ministry to help.

### **Keep everyone safe**

- Have a plan for First Aid, either a station or a room in the church. Intentionally invite anyone who has medical training to volunteer.
- If it's feasible, invite someone with a trained emotional support dog to staff the room as a distraction for any kids who need a band-aid or ice pack.
- Provide water stations throughout your campus to keep kids hydrated.
- If you don't use hand-held radios in your weekend ministry, rent some to be able to communicate with your key leaders without running all over the church.

### **Keep yourself healthy!**

- Ask a prayer warrior friend to be your champion. Give them specific ways to pray for you, including your family relationships. Planning the best week of summer can be stressful, and spiritual attacks can easily happen. Ask your prayer warrior for God's protection, blessing and for your energy. With a weekend program on either side of VBS, you can use all the prayer you can get! Ask for permission to text them with your requests, and share praise requests, too!
- If VBS planning tends to drain your energy, have a talk with your family. Remind them that this is a season to be quick forgivers, and to pray against any personal spiritual attacks.
- Plan something fun for you and your family the week after VBS. Having something to look forward to like a short get-away can help with the long days of planning.