

QUICK START GUIDE

30 / 60 / 90 Day Launch Plan

Your week-by-week action plan for launching an International Student Ministry at your church — from first prayer meeting to a sustaining 6-month strategy.



DAYS 1-30

SPARK

Prepare



DAYS 31-60

CONNECT

Launch



DAYS 61-90

SUSTAIN

Grow

IFI ISM in a Box

Making the World Feel at Home

Welcome

This guide is your week-by-week action plan for launching an International Student Ministry (ISM) at your church. Whether you're starting from scratch or formalizing something that's already begun, this 90-day roadmap will take you from vision to a thriving ministry rhythm.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

- 1 Follow the weeks sequentially — each builds on the last
- 2 Use the checkboxes in the Quick Reference section to track progress
- 3 Reference companion documents in the ISM in a Box Toolkit when noted
- 4 Involve your core team in each phase — this is a team endeavor

Before you begin: Prayerfully commit to this process. International student ministry is one of the highest-leverage mission opportunities available to a local church — students from nearly every nation live within driving distance of most universities. This 90-day guide exists to help you steward that opportunity well.

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DAYS 1-30

MONTH ONE

⚡ SPARK

Prepare

The goal of Month 1 is to lay the foundation. Don't rush to programming. Pray, form your team, assess your context, and connect with IFI. A strong launch starts with strong preparation.

WEEK 1 · DAYS 1-7

Pray and Form Your Core Team

The Goal: *Establish the spiritual foundation and identify the people who will lead this ministry.*

KEY ACTIONS

- Commit the ministry to prayer — individually and as a leadership team
- Cast the vision to your pastor and key church leaders; secure formal buy-in and blessing
- Identify 3–5 individuals with hearts for cross-cultural friendship to form your Core Team
- Designate one person as the Ministry Point Person (champion, coordinator, first contact for students)
- Hold your first Core Team meeting — share the vision, distribute ISM in a Box materials
- Begin praying as a team for specific international students by name (if you know any)

WHAT A GOOD CORE TEAM LOOKS LIKE

- Diverse in age and background (ideally including someone with cross-cultural experience)
- A mix of relational capacity and organizational ability
- At least one person available consistently mid-week (not just Sunday)
- People who will show up, not just sign up

MINISTRY POINT PERSON RESPONSIBILITIES

- Primary liaison between your church and IFI
- First contact for international students
- Coordinator of events and volunteers
- Keeper of student contact information and follow-up

Reflection prompt for your first team meeting: "Think about a time you were a stranger somewhere unfamiliar. What made you feel welcome? What made you feel invisible? How does that shape how we want to treat international students?"

Complete Your Church and Community Assessment

The Goal: *Understand your context so your ministry is designed to fit your community, not just copied from somewhere else.*

KEY ACTIONS

- Research the nearest college or university (distance, international student population, demographics)
- Contact the university's International Student Services (ISS) office — introduce yourself and ask how you can serve
- Survey your church: Who has lived abroad? Who speaks another language? Who has international neighbors or coworkers?
- Identify existing points of connection (international students at your church, community members, ESL programs nearby)
- Map key demographics: Where do students live? What countries are most represented at your nearest campus?
- Assess your facilities: Can you host dinners? Do you have flexible meeting space?

RESEARCH QUESTIONS TO ANSWER THIS WEEK

- How many international students are enrolled at the nearest university?
- What are the top 5 countries of origin?
- Does the university have a welcome week or international orientation? When is it?
- Are there any existing international student organizations on campus?
- What services does the international student office currently lack?

Tip: The university's institutional research office often publishes enrollment data by country of origin. This is publicly available and invaluable for planning.

The Goal: *Activate your IFI partnership and get your team oriented to the broader IFI network and resources.*

KEY ACTIONS

- Contact IFI at ifiusa.org/churches — register your church as a ministry partner
- Connect with your regional IFI staff contact or coach — schedule an introductory call
- Attend (or schedule) the IFI Church Orientation Webinar
- Download and distribute all 7 ISM in a Box Toolkit documents to your Core Team
- Begin reading: 6-Phase Ministry Journey Guide (Toolkit Doc 2) together as a team
- Share your community assessment findings with your IFI contact — they may have existing student connections in your area

WHAT IFI PROVIDES TO PARTNERING CHURCHES

- Regional staff support and coaching
- Connection to IFI's network of international students
- Training resources and curriculum
- Annual ministry reporting framework
- Prayer and encouragement

WHAT YOUR CHURCH PROVIDES

- Committed volunteers and Core Team
- Consistent hospitality and events
- Local knowledge and relationship capacity
- Financial resources for ministry programming

Set Your Launch Date, Create a Budget, and Plan Your First Event

The Goal: *Move from preparation to planning. Commit to a launch date and design your first event.*

KEY ACTIONS

- Choose a Launch Date for your first official student-facing event (align with semester start when possible)
- Create a simple ministry budget using the Ministry Budget Planner (Toolkit Doc 6)
- Identify your First Event type (Welcome Dinner is recommended — see Event Templates, Toolkit Doc 3)
- Reserve church space and set up any logistics for Month 2 events
- Create a simple communication channel for your Core Team (group text, WhatsApp group, or email list)
- Inform your congregation — announce the ministry and invite volunteers
- Pray together over the students who will come

RECOMMENDED FIRST EVENT TIMING

- **Fall Semester:** Late August, aligned with university welcome week (typically 3rd–4th week of August)
- **Spring Semester:** Early January, aligned with spring semester start

MONTH 1 MILESTONE CHECK

- ✓ Core Team of 3–5 assembled with a named Point Person
- ✓ Community assessment completed
- ✓ IFI connection established
- ✓ First event planned, dated, and on calendar
- ✓ Budget drafted

DAYS 31-60

MONTH TWO

CONNECT

Launch

The goal of Month 2 is to make your first real contacts with international students. Get out of planning mode and into relationship mode. Expect imperfection — the goal is presence, not performance.

WEEK 5 · DAYS 31-37

Host Your First Welcome Event

The Goal: *Create a warm, low-pressure first gathering that gives international students a reason to come back.*

KEY ACTIONS

- Host your Welcome Dinner (or chosen first event) — use Event Templates (Toolkit Doc 3) for full playbook
- Collect names, contact info, and country of origin for every student who attends
- Send a personal follow-up text or message within 48 hours to every student
- Debrief with your Core Team within 48 hours: What worked? What surprised you? What would you change?
- Begin a simple Student Contact List (spreadsheet or contact database)
- Invite every student to a follow-up gathering

SUCCESS MARKERS FOR YOUR FIRST EVENT

- 5-15 students attend
- Every student receives a personal greeting
- Contact information collected for all attendees
- Team debrief completed

What to do if turnout is low: Don't be discouraged. First events are about planting seeds. Ask attending students who else they know. Revisit your outreach strategy. The university international office can often send announcements — ask them.

Begin Friendship Pairings

The Goal: *Move beyond events into one-on-one relationships — the heart of what IFI does.*

KEY ACTIONS

- Review the Cultural Primers (Toolkit Doc 4) as a team — focus on the countries most represented at your campus
- Identify 3–5 volunteers ready to begin one-on-one friendship pairings with students
- Match volunteers with students based on proximity, availability, and genuine interest (not just shared nationality)
- Brief volunteers: the goal is genuine friendship, not a program. Meet for coffee, go to a grocery store, share a meal.
- Set expectations: volunteers should aim for 1–2 intentional contacts per week with their student friend
- Establish a simple check-in rhythm for volunteers to report back to the Point Person

FRIENDSHIP PAIRING TIPS

- Don't over-formalize the match — organic connection matters
- Two-way learning is the goal: volunteers learn as much as students
- Invite students into your volunteers' normal lives (family dinners, errands, church events)
- Avoid the "helper/helped" dynamic — you are friends, not a social service

Establish a Weekly Rhythm

The Goal: *Create consistency. International students (and volunteers) need predictable touchpoints, not sporadic events.*

KEY ACTIONS

- Choose a weekly gathering format: dinner, English conversation group, activity night, or small group
- Lock in a consistent day, time, and location — and communicate it clearly to students
- Run your first weekly gathering — keep it simple: food, conversation, warmth
- Document attendance and follow up personally with anyone who doesn't return the following week
- Invite one student to help with setup or planning — this builds ownership early
- Share event info through the university international student office, campus bulletin boards, and student WhatsApp groups

WEEKLY FORMAT OPTIONS

- **Dinner Church:** Simple shared meal with conversation and optional faith sharing
- **English Conversation Group:** Skill-building + relationship (full template in Doc 3)
- **Activity Night:** Game night, movie night, local outing
- **Small Group:** For students who express interest in faith exploration

Recruit and Train Your First Volunteer Cohort

The Goal: *Expand your volunteer base so the ministry doesn't rest on 2-3 people.*

KEY ACTIONS

- Announce volunteer opportunities from the pulpit, in bulletins, and on social media
- Host a Volunteer Information Night — share the vision and what volunteers actually do
- Aim to recruit 5-10 volunteers for consistent monthly engagement
- Run your first Volunteer Training Session — use Volunteer Training Guide (Toolkit Doc 5), Modules 1 and 2
- Set up a simple volunteer schedule and communication channel
- Assign each new volunteer an experienced Core Team member as a mentor/buddy

MONTH 2 MILESTONE CHECK

- ✓ First event hosted, debriefed, and followed up
- ✓ Student contact list started (10+ names ideally)
- ✓ Friendship pairings begun (3-5 pairs)
- ✓ Weekly rhythm established (consistent day/time/location)
- ✓ Volunteer cohort recruited and initial training completed

DAYS 61-90

MONTH THREE

 SUSTAIN

Grow

The goal of Month 3 is to deepen relationships, identify emerging leaders, and build for the long term. The ministry rhythm you've started should begin to feel natural. Now it's time to go deeper.

WEEK 9 · DAYS 61-67

Host a Second Event with Higher Engagement

The Goal: *Build on the first event with more depth — invite students into richer experiences.*

KEY ACTIONS

- Host a second event with higher relational depth (Cultural Exchange Dinner or Thanksgiving Dinner — see Event Templates, Toolkit Doc 3)
- Invite students who came to your first event AND new students they've referred
- Assign each Core Team member to be responsible for 3-4 specific students' experience at the event
- Create a simple printed or digital "What's Coming Up" card to share upcoming gatherings
- Post photos (with permission) and celebrate the event on church communication channels

Begin Pastoral and Spiritual Care Conversations

The Goal: *Move into deeper conversations with students who are showing signs of spiritual openness or personal need.*

KEY ACTIONS

- Identify 3–5 students who have engaged consistently and shown openness to deeper conversation
- Train volunteers in Module 3 of Volunteer Training Guide (Faith Conversations Across Cultures)
- Invite interested students to a small group, Bible study, or one-on-one discipleship conversation
- Equip your pastor or elder to be available for spiritual questions from international students
- Create a simple prayer list for specific students — share with Core Team
- Ask students: "Is there anything I can be praying about for you?"

Note: Many international students come from countries with significant restrictions on Christianity. Sensitivity, patience, and genuine friendship must come before any direct spiritual invitation. Trust takes time. See Cultural Primers (Toolkit Doc 4) for faith context by nationality.

Debrief, Identify What's Working, Adjust

The Goal: *Take stock of the first 10 weeks. Celebrate wins. Honestly assess gaps. Adjust your approach.*

KEY ACTIONS

- Host a full Core Team Debrief Meeting (90 minutes minimum)
- Review student contact list: Who is engaged? Who fell through the cracks? Who needs personal outreach?
- Celebrate every win — names learned, meals shared, friendships formed
- Honestly assess: What events didn't land? What outreach channels aren't working?
- Ask your volunteers: What do they need more support with?
- Write a brief Ministry Update to share with your pastor and church leadership

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- How many unique students have we connected with in 90 days?
- How many consistent volunteers do we have?
- What's our strongest relational touchpoint — which event or format brings the most connection?
- Where are our biggest gaps?
- What do we need to resource differently going into next semester?

Plan Next Semester, Set 6-Month Goals, Report to IFI

The Goal: *Transition from "launch mode" to "sustain mode." Build a long-term ministry vision.*

KEY ACTIONS

- Complete your 90-Day Ministry Report — submit to your IFI coach/contact
- Plan your next semester event calendar (6–8 events, aligned with academic calendar)
- Set 6-month SMART goals (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound)
- Budget for next semester using the Ministry Budget Planner (Toolkit Doc 6)
- Schedule Volunteer Training Modules 3–5 (Volunteer Training Guide, Toolkit Doc 5)
- Celebrate your launch with your Core Team — this is a big deal. Mark it.

SAMPLE 6-MONTH GOALS

- Connect with 25 unique international students
- Establish 10 active volunteer friendships
- Host 6 events with average attendance of 15 students
- Identify 2 students interested in faith conversations
- Recruit and train 15 total volunteers

MONTH 3 MILESTONE CHECK

- ✓ Second event hosted (higher engagement format)
- ✓ Spiritual care conversations initiated
- ✓ Core Team debrief completed
- ✓ Ministry update written for church leadership
- ✓ Next semester calendar planned
- ✓ 6-month goals set
- ✓ 90-day report submitted to IFI

Quick Reference Checklist

Use this summary page to track your overall progress across all three months.

MONTH 1

SPARK — Prepare (Days 1–30)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Core Team formed (3–5 people) | <input type="checkbox"/> Orientation webinar attended |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ministry Point Person designated | <input type="checkbox"/> Launch date set |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community/campus assessment completed | <input type="checkbox"/> Budget drafted |
| <input type="checkbox"/> IFI contact established | <input type="checkbox"/> First event planned |

MONTH 2

CONNECT — Launch (Days 31–60)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> First event hosted and followed up | <input type="checkbox"/> Weekly rhythm established |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student contact list started (10+ names) | <input type="checkbox"/> Volunteers recruited (5–10 people) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Friendship pairings begun (3–5 pairs) | <input type="checkbox"/> Volunteer training (Modules 1–2) completed |

MONTH 3

SUSTAIN — Grow (Days 61–90)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Second event hosted (higher engagement) | <input type="checkbox"/> Next semester calendar planned |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Spiritual care conversations initiated | <input type="checkbox"/> 6-month goals set |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Core Team debrief completed | <input type="checkbox"/> 90-day report submitted to IFI |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ministry update written for church leadership | |

Toolkit Resources

This guide is one of 7 documents in the ISM in a Box Toolkit. Reference companion documents throughout your 90-day journey.

2 6-Phase Ministry Journey Guide

Your long-term roadmap — showing how ministry deepens over months and years. Use after completing your 90-day sprint.

3 Event Templates

Ready-to-use playbooks for 5 key events: Welcome Dinner, Cultural Exchange, Thanksgiving Hosting, English Conversation Group, and Holiday Gathering.

4 Cultural Primers for 30+ Nationalities

Volunteer reference guide for cross-cultural friendship — customs, communication styles, and faith context by country of origin.

5 Volunteer Training Guide

Five training modules for new volunteers: cross-cultural friendship, hosting well, faith conversations, follow-up, and sustaining commitment.

6 Ministry Budget Planner

Financial planning templates for Year 1 and ongoing ministry programming. Includes sample budgets by church size.

7 Master Step-by-Step Launch Guide

The flagship overview document — all 28 steps across the 6 phases, the strategic framework behind the model, and the full vision for what ISM can become.

IFI ISM in a Box

Empowering churches to befriend and disciple international students

ifiusa.org

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