HOME-CENTERED • CHURCH-SUPPORTED

Evaluating Stake Activities

A Handbook-Based Rubric
Protecting the Work of Wards and Families

THE GOVERNING PRINCIPLE

The Order Matters

The Handbook establishes the governing principle: “God’s work of salvation and exaltation is centered in the home and supported by the Church” (2.3). Within that supporting structure, most Church activities are held at the ward level, and stake activities should supplement ward activities rather than compete with them (20.3.1-20.3.2).

Each test below translates that allocation of responsibility into a practical question. Stake activities must be evaluated in light of identified needs, the ward-level norm, and the requirement to supplement rather than compete (20.3.1-20.3.2). These questions examine stewardship and cumulative burden. Section 6.7 specifically addresses stake organization leaders; its boundary is cited here in that scope.

Leaders are responsible for preventing excessive burdens (2.3; 29.1). Applied here, that means proactively examining the demands they create and protecting ward and family capacity, without waiting for someone to object.

SEVEN TESTS FOR STAKE ACTIVITIES

Stewardship • Necessity • Substitution • Multiplier
Displacement • Support • Removal

A derived rubric for discussion and discernment.
Not an official Church rubric.

Based on the supplied December 2025 edition of the General Handbook: Serving in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Stewardship Test

Whose work is this?

Before creating a stake activity, ask whether the work is properly assigned to the stake or belongs primarily to the ward or family. The main responsibilities of stake organization leaders include instructing and supporting ward organization presidencies. The Handbook expressly says: “They do not fulfill assignments that should be fulfilled at the ward or family level” (6.7).

It also says these leaders do not create additional responsibilities for ward organization presidencies (6.7). This boundary sits beneath the broader rule that God’s work is centered in the home and supported by the Church (2.3).

> **DIAGNOSTIC QUESTION**
> If a ward or family can appropriately perform this work, what specifically requires the stake to perform it instead?

Supporting sources: 6.7, “Stake Organizations”; 2.3, “The Relationship between the Home and the Church.”

Necessity Test

What identified need calls for a stake-level response?

Before planning an activity, leaders consider members’ needs (20.2), then whether stake activities would help meet them (20.3.1). Most activities are held at ward level; many are not essential and are organized as needed (20.3.1; 2.3).

Ask and listen about people’s needs before developing an activity proposal. For youth, learn from youth, parents, bishoprics, and ward youth leaders. Council leaders encourage candid speech (4.4.3); leaders meeting with members permit free expression and avoid using spiritual teaching to coerce or cause fear (31.1.2, 31.1.5). Applied here, honest reports of strain must be received without treating them as disloyalty.

Ask what is needed, what families and wards already provide, and what remains unmet. Let the response emerge from that understanding. Reactions to an activity already conceived do not establish the underlying need. Support for existing efforts or relief from demands may be the appropriate response.

> **DIAGNOSTIC QUESTION**
> Before proposing an activity, whom have we asked about their needs and circumstances? Can they answer candidly without having their faithfulness questioned? What remains unmet, and does it call for a stake activity, another form of support, or fewer demands?

Supporting sources: 20.2, “Planning Activities”; 20.3.1, “General Guidelines”; 2.3, “The Relationship between the Home and the Church”; 4.4.3, “Discussion and Decisions”; 31.1.2, “Help the Member Feel God’s Love”; 31.1.5, “Ask Inspired Questions and Listen Carefully.”

Substitution Test

Is the stake supplementing the ward, or causing the ward to accommodate the stake?

The Handbook requires stake leaders to ensure that stake activities "supplement ward activities rather than compete with them" (20.3.2). In its youth instructions, it repeats that rule and adds: "Stake activities should not be so frequent that they place a burden on wards" (29.3.9).

Competition concerns the finite time, attention, leadership effort, and youth availability needed for ward and family responsibilities. Preparation, recruitment, transportation, and coordination consume that capacity and can displace its proper use. A simultaneous scheduling conflict is only one narrow example.

> **DIAGNOSTIC QUESTION**
> What ward leadership effort, youth availability, and family time will this consume? What preparation, recruitment, transportation, or reorganization will wards absorb? Which ward or family responsibilities will consequently receive less time and attention?

Supporting sources: 20.3.2, "Stake Activities"; 29.3.9, "Stake Youth Leadership Committee."

Multiplier Test

What is the cumulative burden after this is multiplied through every ward and family?

This test applies the Handbook's burden principle. Stake youth activities must not become frequent enough to burden wards (29.3.9). Leaders ensure that the number and length of meetings do not burden members or families (29.1); programs and activities must not require excessive sacrifices (2.3). These duties are not conditional on receiving complaints.

Assess the total demand across wards and households: participation, preparation, travel, coordination, and overlapping callings. A two-hour event can consume hundreds of family-hours. Frequency must be assessed through cumulative effects, rather than by assuming that any particular number is automatically acceptable.

Silence and continued attendance do not establish an absence of burden, especially where expressing strain risks being judged disloyal or unfaithful. This conclusion applies the duties to prevent excessive demands and enable honest expression (2.3; 4.4.3; 31.1.5).

> **DIAGNOSTIC QUESTION**
> What cumulative demands reach each ward and household? What do preparation, travel, and overlapping responsibilities add? What have we examined ourselves, beyond waiting for complaints, and what will we reduce or remove to protect capacity?

Supporting sources: 29.3.9, "Stake Youth Leadership Committee"; 29.1, "Planning and Conducting Meetings"; 2.3, "The Relationship between the Home and the Church"; 4.4.3, "Discussion and Decisions"; 31.1.5, "Ask Inspired Questions and Listen Carefully."

Displacement Test

What good thing loses space because this good thing is added?

Church service should not detract from members' ability to fulfill responsibilities at home, at work, and elsewhere. Members should neither be overwhelmed nor asked to make excessive sacrifices for Church programs or activities (2.3).

The home is a primary place of gospel learning: "Gospel teaching and learning are home-centered and Church-supported" (2.2.3). Time consumed by an activity cannot simultaneously serve home responsibilities. Applied here, leaders should examine displaced work before exhaustion becomes visible or a family feels compelled to object.

> **DIAGNOSTIC QUESTION**
> What will this consume: family dinner, parent-child time, home gospel teaching, rest, ministering, family recreation, schoolwork, employment, or ward responsibilities? What will be reduced or removed to protect those responsibilities? Continued participation does not answer what is being displaced.

Supporting sources: 2.3, "The Relationship between the Home and the Church"; 2.2.3, "Gospel Study and Learning at Home."

Support Test

Does this increase another stewardship's capacity, or replace its work?

Stake organization leaders are principally charged to assist the stake presidency and to instruct and support ward organization presidencies. They are expressly directed not to perform assignments belonging at the ward or family level (6.7). Leaders and teachers are also told to honor the role of parents and assist them (2.3).

Genuine support strengthens another stewardship's ability to act. Substitution makes the higher organization the principal actor while wards and families become participants in work designed and driven by that organization.

Individuals and families assess their circumstances when choosing participation in nonessential programs (2.3). Such a choice alone cannot establish unfaithfulness. Priesthood influence must operate through persuasion, patience, gentleness, and sincere love (Doctrine and Covenants 121:41-42). Applied here, leaders must guard against fear of spiritual disapproval becoming the means of securing participation.

> **DIAGNOSTIC QUESTION**
> Are ward leaders and parents more capable of fulfilling their own stewardship? Are their judgments about family circumstances respected? Does participation reflect willing conviction, or are we relying on pressure people may find difficult to name?

Supporting sources: 6.7, "Stake Organizations"; 2.3, "The Relationship between the Home and the Church"; 31.1.2, "Help the Member Feel God's Love"; Doctrine and Covenants 121:37, 41-42.

Removal Test

What would actually fail if the stake did not do this?

Most activities are held at the ward level. Periodic stake activities should serve the purposes of Church activities and respond to identified needs (20.3.1). Many programs and activities are not essential and should be organized according to need, local circumstances, and resources (2.3).

Removing an activity can reveal whether it fills a real gap or chiefly adds another demand. The absence of an essential task is a reason to reconsider an activity, rather than an automatic prohibition: the Handbook also recognizes the benefits of appropriate stake activities, including a wider circle of friendships (20.3.1).

> **DIAGNOSTIC QUESTION**
> If we remove this activity from the stake calendar, what necessary work of salvation and exaltation will no longer occur? What identified need would go unmet? If wards and families would chiefly regain time to perform their own work, what justifies retaining it?

Supporting sources: 20.3.1, “General Guidelines”; 2.3, “The Relationship between the Home and the Church.”

Who Is Adjusting to Whom?

Read together, these tests give practical meaning to the Handbook’s instructions about stewardship, burden, and support. If the stake regularly adjusts itself to protect ward and family stewardship, the supporting order is functioning. If wards and families continually reorganize themselves around added stake programming, leaders should examine whether that order has inverted.

Leaders must examine the demands they create and make candid answers safe to give. Silence and attendance are insufficient evidence that capacity is protected. The question is whether an addition meets an identified need while preserving ward and family stewardship (2.3; 4.4.3; 29.1; 31.1.2, 31.1.5).

In Exodus 18:13-24, Jethro observes an exhausting administrative arrangement and urges change; Moses listens. Applied here, leaders should recognize and address excessive demands without requiring the people carrying them to complain first.

The Stake must decrease,
and the Family must increase.

A thematic adaptation of John 3:30

“Decrease” means training and supporting ward leaders, strengthening parents in their own role, and leaving sufficient space for the home to function as the center the Handbook says it is. The question is more demanding than whether another activity can fit on the calendar.