

Consulting on the case: the leadership perspective

The planning group will prepare a first draft of the case statement. It is then taken to the church council or leadership team for consultation. This paper explains why this consultation process is important.



The planning group draft a case statement in which they have both confidence and personal ownership and commitment to respond to the financial challenge. The next step is to share the planning group draft with the church leadership, perhaps a standing committee or a full church council. This is the *consultation* at Section 7 of the case statement.

Distribute the case first

One option is to send the draft case for each church leader to read and to complete Section 7 in advance of a church council meeting to discuss the case. This enables each leader to come to the meeting fully prepared. A cover note should affirm that case has the unqualified support of the planning group. A brief initial presentation of the case may be in order but leave plenty of time for discussion. Key discussion points are noted and recorded and the various Section 7 papers from the leadership consultation are passed to the planning group chair who will amend the case as needed, reflecting observations and comments.

An initial presentation

A second option is for the planning group to make an initial presentation of the key elements of the case statement to the church council or leadership team. This has the advantage of demonstrating the shared ownership and personal commitment of the planning group and reduces the risk of people taking defensive positions before the meeting.

The case statement is then distributed in hard copy or electronically. Each church leader is asked to read and reflect at home and then to complete and return Section 7 to the planning group chair to review the responses. A second meeting may then discuss any case statement revisions.

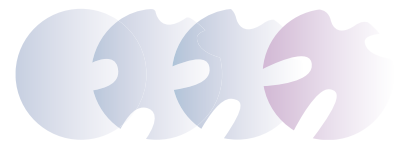
One to one consultations

Where it is possible a fruitful approach is for the planning group members to have one to one conversations with church leaders prior to or after discussion at a council meeting. Now, this is very much a counsel of perfection but it is not impossible and the rewards are great. The more buy in, the stronger both the case and the programme will be.

Some practical points

Allocate enough time to the discussion of the case. Don't rush things. The aim is not to get it off the agenda but to get buy in from the church leadership both individually and as a leadership team. For the same reason taking the case to the leadership is not a rubber stamp exercise. The case is not an argument to be sustained or a position to be defended. It is the starting point of a holy conversation about ministry and how it can be resourced by the household of faith.

As above, the after consultation the draft case may need editing. The church council or leadership team may request further discussion or may mandate the planning group to make changes and design the programme.



Why all this consultation?

The above approach is a counsel of perfection. In practice churches will discuss and build support for the case in all sorts of ways. But don't ditch the consultation so as to "get on with the job". Our task is stewardship ministry not a capital campaign. To be sure there are extensive, rich and creative overlaps between capital fundraising and good stewardship practice. Our focus here is upon building a culture of generous discipleship.

The goal is a community of Christians who know that God is the owner and giver of all things. We know ourselves to be stewards of personal finance, of the environment and of justice in an unjust world. The hallmark, the litmus test of our stewardship is generosity. It's a core value for our Christian community and the resource that unlocks ministry. The purpose of this consultation is a small step in building this culture of generous stewardship in our church. It's a goal worth the time invested in it.

The case statement combines a robust understanding of the present with a vision for the future. So our consultation matters because our leadership must have confidence in the identification of underlying issues and in the ministry and mission goals. Leaders must be both champions and advocates of that future and thereby of the Giving in Grace programme that seeks to resource it.

Leadership consultation can reap rich rewards. The interest and involvement of church leaders leads to greater investment than being passive givers to a financial need. Churches whose stewardship programmes have had limited impact can often trace the cause to a failure of leadership; to inadequate or lukewarm support and advocacy.

Personal commitment

It is worth emphasising here that the church leadership is not being asked to simply agree a form of words in the case statement. To be sure, leaders are invited to 'sign off' on the case statement. But they are also invited to be advocates, story tellers for the case statement and for the *design of the programme* built on the foundations laid by the case statement.

To be clear, in the consultation no one is asked to declare their personal decision around increased

giving or any other aspect of their personal response to a Giving in Grace initiative in the church. That *personal response* is a separate and personal matter.

It can be hard, but sadly experience suggests that some leaders can voice support for the case and the programme but subsequently fail to make any personal response themselves. The consultation process seeks to encourage ownership and engagement so that leaders model what they ask for from the congregations.

Sharing the corporate increase

In many churches the leadership commitment is made visible by leaders making their personal giving response first and sharing the *corporate* commitment to increased giving with the congregation.



That is to say, the leadership receive the literature and return their response forms with their own pledged commitment to increase giving *before the letters go out to the congregation*.

Subsequent congregational letters include a sentence that states the corporate giving increase from the planning group and church council or leadership team.

For example, the *clergy ask letter* might state that the giving increase target is £227 per week and that the church leadership have between themselves already committed to a total giving increase of £77. This powerfully makes the point that the leadership are not asking others to do what they will not do themselves.