Many Ways to Get There

Securing Public Investments in Richmond, VA

Practitioner Guide

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Overview

A case study is a story about how a person or group of people dealt with challenges or opportunities they faced. It is based on desk research and interviews with key actors, but it does not provide analysis or conclusions. It is written from the perspective of the protagonist(s) and is designed to raise questions and generate discussion about the challenges the protagonist(s) faced. Cases are meant to help participants develop analytic reasoning, listening, and judgment skills to help them make the best decisions in future contexts.

A case-based conversation is a way to anchor a conceptual discussion to concrete examples. It can bring a case to life and enable discussion participants to place themselves in the shoes of the case protagonist(s). It should also allow participants to surface a variety of perspectives. This guide is designed to help you run a conversation about the case, "Many Ways to Get There: Securing Public Investments in Richmond, VA."

Role of Facilitator

The facilitator leads a conversation with a clear beginning and end, ensures that everyone is heard, and keeps the group focused. The conversation can be broken into three distinct segments: exploring the case, diagnosing the challenges, and formulating takeaways. Some facilitation tips and tricks to keep in mind are below:

BEFORE the discussion
Make sure everyone takes the time to read the case and fill out the attached worksheet to prepare for the case discussion. When setting up the room, think about situating discussion participants where everyone can see each other and you. Designate a note taker as well as a place where you can take notes on a flipchart or white board.

Plan for at least forty to fifty minutes to discuss the case and takeaways (depending on participants' familiarity with negotiation) and have a clock in the room and/or an assigned timekeeper. Mention that you might interrupt participants in the interest of progressing the conversation.

DURING the discussion
Encourage participants to debate and share opinions. State very clearly that there is no right or wrong "answer" to the case—cases are written so that reasonable people can disagree and debate different ideas and approaches. Be careful not to allow yourself or others to dominate the discussion. If the conversation is getting heated or bogged down on a particular issue, consider allowing participants to talk in pairs for a few minutes before returning to a full group discussion. Do not worry about reaching consensus, just make the most of this opportunity to practice thinking and learning together!

Case Synopsis

In his FY20 budget, Mayor Levar Stoney made a bold and ambitious proposal that would fully fund Richmond Public Schools and infrastructure needs in the City. This budget would also address some of the major ticket items for transit expansion and affordable housing. These priorities would improve the lives of people in Richmond, especially poor and underserved residents. To fund these projects, Stoney proposed a nine-cent real estate tax increase, changing the rate from $1.20 to $1.29 per $100 of assessed property value. This proposal was quickly scrapped by the majority of Richmond City Council, who argued that a tax increase was unnecessary.

The case pushes participants to understand the difference between positions and interests and think about how fixation on positions can compromise creative problem-solving. How does one advocate firmly for interests without isolating negotiating counterparts? How do you generate options that satisfy different parties, and what criteria should you apply?

Conversation Plan

Part 1: Exploring the Case (20–30 minutes)
The goal of this part of the conversation is to review the case from the point of view of the people involved. Suggested questions:

- *What did Stoney want to accomplish during the FY20 budget process? Why?*
- *What did Stoney do well?*
- *What would you do differently if you were in his position? Why?*

Part 2a: Diagnosing Negotiation Challenges (20–30 minutes)
This part of the discussion should allow participants to understand how the budget hearing hit an impasse, with city administrators walking out and city council considering whether to sue Stoney. This discussion may be based on the following simple questions:

- *What did city council want during the FY20 budget process? Why?*
- *What was the relationship between the mayor and city council like during this process? What led to the frustration at the end of the case?*
- *What opportunities were available for the mayor and city council to resolve their differences over the budget before the walkout?*

Part 2b: Application (20 minutes)
If time allows, participants may break into groups or remain in plenary to apply the concepts discussed to their own negotiation challenges. Suggested questions:

- *What are your goals and why? What are your counterparts' goals and why? What options do you think could work for both (or all) parties?*
- *How would you create the conditions for better communication?*

Part 3: Formulating Lessons (15–20 minutes)
This part of the conversation focuses on the lessons of the case that participants will continue to reflect on and apply to challenges in their work. Some sample, high-level takeaways to review after a productive discussion are the following:

- Negotiators must ask, listen, and probe to understand the other party's interests. In this case, both the mayor and members of city council focused on their positions rather than communicating to find options that would meet both of their interests.
- When negotiations hit an impasse, it is necessary to look at many different dimensions. One component that frustrated city council was the budget hearing process, which was short and allowed little room for collaboration with the mayor's administration. While councilmembers were discontent with the process, their frustration was also partially directed towards the mayor.
- When a negotiator's standards of fairness are not persuasive, or are unfair to the other party, it is necessary to see how they can appeal to the other side's standards and interests. Alternatively, both sides can work to find mutually agreeable and fair criteria. In this case, Stoney used historical standards to justify the need to raise real estate taxes (including the historical real estate tax rates before the 2008 recession and historical disinvestment), and city council used its own standards to justify not raising taxes (including the need to maintain affordability, the City's rising property assessments, and surrounding counties' real estate rates).

Appendices

Worksheet 1 Pre-Discussion Questions

Use this worksheet to prepare for a conversation about the case study.

1. *What problems did Mayor Stoney try to solve? How did he try to resolve them?*

2. *What problems did city council members try to solve? How did they go about resolving them?*

   a. *Are there similarities among the problems that city council and Stoney wanted to address?*

3. *When city council proposed cuts to balance the budget, how did Stoney respond?*

   a. *What impact did his response have on city council?*

   b. *Why do you think Mayor Stoney adopted this strategy?*

   c. *What would you have done differently in his position?*

4. *If you were in Stoney's position, what would your next step(s) be towards improving the situation, and why?*