

Making a Statement

Mayor Libby Schaaf and the Sanctuary City of Oakland, CA

Practitioner Guide

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Overview

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

A case-based conversation is a way to anchor a conceptual discussion to concrete examples. It can bring a case to life and allow participants to place themselves in the shoes of the case protagonist(s), while also allowing a variety of perspectives to surface. This guide is designed to help you lead a conversation about the case, “Making a Statement: Mayor Libby Schaaf and the Sanctuary City of Oakland, CA.”

Role of a 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, applying the central questions of the case to your organization’s challenges, and formulating takeaway lessons. Some facilitation tips and tricks to keep in mind are below.

BEFORE the discussion

Make sure everyone takes the time to read the case. Participants also have the option to fill out the attached worksheet to prepare themselves for the case discussion. If you choose to use the worksheet, make sure you bring enough printouts for all. When setting up the room, think about situating participants where they can see you and each other. Designate a notetaker as well as a place where you can take notes on a flipchart or white board. Plan for at least sixty to seventy-five minutes to discuss the case and takeaways and have a clock in the room and/or an assigned timekeeper. Mention that you may 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 February 2018, Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf learned through unofficial sources that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) was planning to arrest a large number of undocumented immigrants in her city. Oakland had been a “sanctuary city” since 1986 and more than one in ten residents were undocumented. Mayor Schaaf believed that the ICE action was the Trump administration’s political retaliation against California’s sanctuary cities, and feared that law-abiding immigrants in her community, who she saw as scapegoats for a broken federal immigration system, would be swept up in the raid and subject to deportation. With very little time and potentially significant legal implications, Mayor Schaaf had to decide whether and how to alert the community to a threat she took to be highly credible.

The case is designed to help mayors, city leaders, and other public executives think through morally fraught leadership challenges.

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 were the advantages and disadvantages of warning residents about potential ICE enforcement actions?*
- *What key issues should Mayor Schaaf have considered in making her decision?*
- *What alternatives would you have considered in her place?*

Part 2a: Diagnosing Moral Leadership Challenges (20–30 minutes)

This part of the discussion should allow participants to analyze Schaaf’s decision as a moral leadership problem. Briefly review the epilogue of the case. Suggested discussion questions:

- *What role did Schaaf’s personal beliefs and morality play in her decision?*
- *What norms and laws associated with her role as mayor constrained her actions?*
- *What larger cultural, social, and political forces in the community came into play as she made her decision and dealt with its aftermath?*
- *How well aligned were these three realms of her responsibility?*
- *How did she manage any misalignments?*

Part 2b: Application (20 minutes)

If time allows, participants may break into groups to apply the concepts discussed to their own moral leadership challenges, repurposing the questions posed in part 2a.

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 collaborative challenges in their work. Some sample, high-level takeaways to review after a productive discussion are the following:

- Sometimes a perceived moral duty may compel public leaders to risk operating outside of the usual scope of their authority.
- Sometimes the perceived scope of a public leader’s authority is significantly smaller than the actual scope of their authority.
- Public leaders must seek a path that aligns their personal morality with the expectations and constraints associated with their role and affirms shared values within their community.

