



Hiring a ministry management consultant

An action guide from IMMC

Have you considered hiring a ministry consultant to assist with critical issues, help *put out fires*, or provide training for your staff or volunteers? Deciding that you need assistance is just the first step; next comes convincing a board of deacons or elders that professional assistance would be a wise investment and cost-effective means of dealing with an issue.

Business leaders regularly use consultants to fill staffing or skill gaps, provide staff training, tackle short-term projects, meet deadlines, improve efficiency, and for mentoring, and executive coaching. The Bible chronicles many examples of the judicious use of coaches and consultants, including Jethro's wise counsel to Moses, and Paul's mentoring of Timothy.

The following guide should help make a strong case for hiring a ministry consultant.

1. Consultants provide expertise, experience, and capabilities that may not be available within the church community

Ministers and church leaders need access to the expertise and knowledge offered by consultants to monitor, explore, and implement innovative advances in knowledge and communication. To be effective churches need to become learning organizations that remain true to biblical principles and values while adapting to changing environments. This requires a seemingly continuous shift in paradigms, program models, and church cultures. An effective consultant provides advisory assistance, skill-sets, training, and change management expertise that helps clients cope with the problem issues that impact the church.

Consultants can assist clients with developing strategies and innovative approaches that help the church move confidently into uncharted waters and toward new horizons. They provide the flexibility and short-term resident expertise needed to reach goals and objectives without the requirement of a long-term staff position. Consultants can provide staff mentoring, leadership development, and coaching to provide for the continued growth and professional development of the pastor, senior staff, and ministry leaders.

2. A church consultant can provide an impartial assessment of sensitive or critical issues

Consultants provide expertise and broad experience needed to evaluate situations and issues unencumbered by conflicting viewpoints, passions, or internal politics that may obstruct decisive action on the part of the pastor. The consultant can offer an unbiased recommendation on an issue without inflicting personal offense that can occur when a pastor appears to "take sides" on a sensitive issue.

3. A church consultant can help increase ministry efficiency

Consultants provide access to an increased knowledge base without the need for a learning curve when existing staff are asked to develop an equivalent internal knowledge base. Few staff members have the information technology skills to handle complex networking problems or handle a tricky public relations issue involving media relations.

In churches large and small, the senior pastor and ministry leadership have precious little time to tackle additional responsibilities, oversee a special project, implement a new program, or effectively evaluate a new ministry opportunity. A consultant can be called in to handle such tasks in short order without detracting from existing programs. Consultants focus on their assigned tasks without neglecting other critical church activities. Perhaps a church is planning a special event and needs an event planner to organize it and direct church volunteers or a music consultant to identify and procure talented musicians to make the evening memorable. When presented with a problem or difficult situation, a consultant can



report their findings, evaluate alternatives, provide recommendations, and outline “next-steps” for the consideration of the senior pastor and church leadership.

With input and direction of the church leadership, the consultant can then develop an action plan and provide any additional project management or expertise needed and desired by the church.

4. Using church consultants is cost effective means of reaching your church goals

Church consultants provide their client churches with cost effective means of increasing their human resource pool without the long-term commitments associated with hired staff. Consultants serve you just as another staff person would without the church incurring the additional salary, overhead, and benefit expenses. Consultants can suggest and help arrange special cooperative purchasing agreements for goods and services where economies-of-scale can save participating churches on needed items such as paper and cleaning products, and maintenance and cleaning services.

Consultants can work on an as-needed basis or provide a longer-term association through the use of retainers. Using a consultant on an as-needed basis allows the church to benefit from the consultants expertise and skills without the financial burden of adding staff. Perhaps your church needs graphic and website design support to improve the church website and communicate with members online.

Why would I retain a consultant? Your situation may not require the long-term assistance offered by placing a consultant on retainer. But it is an effective means of ensuring that the consultant’s expertise, knowledge, and skills are available on a regular basis from a few hours, to a set number of days or few weeks each month. The predetermined availability of a consultant can be important when you are in the midst of a long-term project or program; in such situations, a retainer may be a consideration.

5. A reputable church consultant will only offer solutions and alternatives that meet the benchmarks of integrity, transparency, and ethics established in the Bible

The theology of the church is the sacred responsibility of the minister and church leadership. A reliable consultant will not encroach on areas of church doctrine, but will frame their solutions, alternatives, and advice around the central precepts of the client church.

Decision Tree: A key issue to bear in mind when considering the use of a consultant is “what will be the consequences of not hiring a specialist”. Some questions to consider include:

- Does success depend on sound advice and support?
- Will lack of knowledge about a particular subject make it a ministry or program less effective?
- How will failure in a particular area reflect on your leadership?
- Will assigning the issue to a staff person or volunteer that lacks subject matter expertise produce the desired results?

These are questions that only you can answer, and which once determined the answers to these and other questions should drive your decision.

The IMMC ministry consulting group provides training and biblically principled solutions and recommendations with integrity and transparency..