



Lead: Resource River

When churches struggle with finances most leaders normally default to seeing one issue: "Our people just aren't giving enough." While the principle of 20% of the people provide 80% of the resources is usually not that far from reality, there is good news. Every church actually has multiple streams which control the flow level of the Resource River. So the good news is cash flow can be increased when these streams are fully released to produce all they can. Every ministry can contribute to the Resource River and most do not realize how their streams may currently be blocked.

Let's take a look.

Vision Stream: Release the stream of a clear and measurable vision.

Because it isn't as tangible as other streams, people often forget that vision contributes to the vast majority of resource building. Learn to lead with vision and you will see this stream open up. The vision must be focused, clear, measurable, and actionable. Many churches either do not possess a clearly articulated vision, or they have one that is too broad to engage a congregation. Generosity is released when people can clearly see the difference it is making in advancing the mission of the kingdom through vision. When churches do not have clear vision, they tend to use attendance and money as a measure. Churches tend to lead with too many new ideas and a calendar full of good activities rather than focused, vision-fulfilling events.

Here are some helpful discussion questions related to your vision.

- a. Is your vision focused enough that it easily helps you discern the ministries in which to invest your resources, or do you have trouble saying no to good activities?
- b. Is your vision clear enough that your people know the most important tasks ahead, or does your vision leave the level of importance up to the individual?
- c. Is your vision measurable in terms of discipleship, or only participation in church activities?
- d. Is your vision easy for each member to step into and become a player, or do you put too much pressure on your people to figure it out for themselves?

Two great resources to help with vision clarity are [Church Unique](#) and [God Dreams](#) by Will Mancini.

Discipleship Stream: Release the stream of a discipleship pathway that reflects your vision.

When churches do not have a clear vision, they tend to mistake participation in activities with engagement in discipleship. Churches can struggle with measuring the transformation of the heart. However, it can be measured in a grace-oriented way that is both helpful to the church leader and the church participant. When discipleship growth is not clearly articulated, a church attender is forced to define discipleship. Unfortunately, as they listen to church messaging and experience church culture, it can be concluded that a good church member attends certain events, dresses a certain way, and talks a certain talk.

Here are some questions to help you lead well as you help your people grow as disciples.

- a. **Following God Daily** - What practical tools are we providing to help people grow in their personal relationship of knowing and walking with God each day of the week?

We can never teach people exactly what they need to know to follow God better in a given week. However, God's word tells us his Holy Spirit is there to teach, guide, comfort, reveal, and grow His people. He knows exactly what people need and the church leader's job is to help his people grow their relationship with God. Facilitating prayer, Bible study, listening to God, and living with a yielded spirit are non-negotiable habits.

b. Connecting With People - Are we providing ways of personal engagement that are people friendly, easy for an individual to traverse, and rewarding attendees with a meaningful growth experience?

Simply making an announcement or creating a sign-up list is not as people friendly as church leaders often think. It is intimidating for people to walk into a new group of people. Simply offering Small Groups or Sunday School is not enough. How are groups critical to the fulfillment of church vision? What specific growth steps are you planning for people to experience? What specific helps, tools, resources, and opportunities are you providing that easily help people take their next growth step in their discipleship? Do people know exactly how they can grow in a group beyond what they may gain in a worship experience or on their own during the week? What type of transformation can you promise will occur in a group that a person would not want to miss? Create simple steps to help people get into groups and grow.

c. Fulfilling My Life Purpose - Are we doing all we can to help people discern their giftedness, passions, and resources, and then training them to release their God-given role in the body of Christ?

Ultimately, the church has completed its mission when a person has moved from salvation to full engagement in living the mission as a part of the body of Christ. People can be riddled with pain, shame, and guilt over their past, or they can be filled with pride in their personal success. Both extremes deceive people and lead them to miss their life calling. How is your church helping them gain confidence in their giftedness, providing meaningful places to live out the mission? Volunteering to serve on a team to make sure an event occurs or a ministry happens is a very church-centric way of thinking. People do not want their life mission to be volunteering for an organization because it has a need. They want to fulfill their God-given destiny. Help your leadership and people move their concept from filling teams with volunteers to releasing disciples to fulfill their mission.

Guest Experiences Stream: Release the stream of a focused guest experience process.

Generosity begins in the parking lot. Try not to limit finances to a budget and offering time, but see it in people and environments. A guest will hopefully one day turn into a transformed, generous disciple living and supporting the mission. A generous culture begins the minute someone steps on your property. In this day and age it actually begins with your website, app, and community-driven service projects. People have checked your church out far more times than you can imagine in advance of their first steps on the soil. Moving a guest from the community into their first physical experience with a church activity is extremely important. Guests will pass through many gates before they ever sit in a worship seat and hear the first beat of music. They have formed several opinions before the service goes live. Generosity is not just about money. It is about heart, words, environment, culture, and people.

Here are some topics you may want to consider discussing to expand your generous culture beyond the offering plate and budget needs:

a. Does our church website and app help a guest know exactly what they need to know in a warm and inviting way? A guest is just learning, so they do not need to know everything about your church programming. They simply need to know enough to successfully make their first on-campus visit, then their second.

b. Is the physical appearance of your facility warm, inviting, and easy to navigate? Your environments communicate when no one else is around to interpret. Make sure they are clean, well-kept, safe, and user-friendly. Make sure people know where to park, what door to enter, where to take their kids, and how to get more information. A guest should walk away feeling like they were an honored part of your activity and clearly know what they can do next to learn more.

c. Do you communicate generosity from the platform? Words matter. How you talk from the stage is extremely important. Speak to the guests as you would a brand new visitor in your home. Help them become oriented to their surroundings and let them know what to expect. Celebrate stories of impact and success during your worship service. Share stories of lives and families being helped. Pray for God's best over the people in the room and the city you serve. When it comes to the offering, employ a wide variety of Offering Talks highlighting scripture, connecting resources to impact, and even providing pastoral care to those who are having tough financial times.

d. Do you clearly lead people to make a spiritual decision and take their next step with Jesus? Do not assume people know what to do. Help them complete a decision card, come forward for prayer, or easily do whatever your clear next step is. Remove as many barriers as you can to allow God to work as powerfully as possible. People are very fearful of what may be asked of them publicly at church. Alleviate fears and let them know it is a safe place to follow God.

e. What bread crumbs do we put out for your guests to have a compelling second visit? There is really only one goal with first time guests: help them not want to miss out on a second experience with your church. Do not expect a guest to come back immediately or jump in head long. Genuinely thank them for coming and make sure they know what to do next and how to get an answer if they have a question. Creating a positive guest culture from the beginning to the end of the experience is not only good for the guest, but it trains your people on the most important mission of every church experience. Help people keep coming back for more of what God is doing.

ALIGNMENT STREAM: Release the stream of an aligned ministry investment plan.

If you find yourself caught in the trap of measuring participation in a high volume of church activities as success, you will need to jump off that treadmill. Running at the next weekend worship service and subjectively measuring how it felt in the room is not the best way to measure your investment of resources. Over time, churches tend to add well-meaning activities to their calendar. We create new ideas, but rarely retire the old ones. Both the church calendar, budget, and volunteer teams can be running on fumes. The easiest way to gain more resources for the most important ministry activities is to channel more funds to them from those activities that have seen stronger days or simply might not be as important to the church's future as they have been in the past.

Here are some helpful discussion starters. Remember to not only think about participation in a given ministry activity, but the potential leadership/volunteer meetings or trainings that need to be done to support the given activity.

Attempt to organize the most critical ministry activities by levels:

Level 1 - Discipleship Strategy - If we could only engage our busy people in three key activities a week that help them fulfill our vision what would those three activities be?

Level 2 - Discipleship Strategy Support - What ministry activities are absolutely required to make Level 1 activities a success?

Level 3 - Discipleship Strategy Bridges - Periodically, what ministry activities do we engage in that build a bridge from Level 1 and Level 2 events?

Level 4 - Disconnected - What ministries are we surprised about that did not make it into Levels 1-3? Is there a ministry gap in Level 1-3 where Level 4 activities can be retooled to support Level 1-3 ministries?

Level 5 - Discontinue - What ministries remain uncategorized and do they need to experience a sunset?

Leadership Pipeline Stream: Release the stream of a leadership pipeline.

The more engaged a person becomes in the vision, the more they will grow as a personal disciple. The more they see lives being transformed through the church's internal and external mission efforts, the more resources will be released. People should not stay the same or stay in the same place of engagement. Most churches chase after volunteers to complete their ministry teams. However, possessing a system that develops people to fulfill their personal highest good is a much better process. One day your church can boast a surplus of volunteers, leaders, and resources. I know this might be hard to imagine. However, if your church is not experiencing a surplus of the spiritual fruit of ministry, you may want to discover the reason why.

- a. Name several people that are highly involved in your church. Trace back through their growth path from how they first came to your church, their path of growth, and their level of current engagement.
- b. Label the pattern of steps that these people have taken. See what similarities exist. You want to try to develop some confidence in how people uniquely process through your church. This may have happened on purpose or accidentally. Nevermind the level of intentionality, celebrate how God has used your efforts. See if you can label the pattern of how guests most likely rise to the highest level of leadership in your church.
- c. What steps in the process might be missing that, if added, will increase success? How might you operationalize this process?
- d. As churches grow they often move from volunteers doing the work of ministry to hiring staff. Hiring staff can cost 50% or more of the church's annual ministry budget. If you had a stronger and more intentional leadership pipeline, how might you elevate more people to unpaid staff level positions as opposed to hiring more staff?

A great resource is [Ministry Grid](#). You will find step by step training for you and your team. It will include broad topics, like Leadership Pipeline, as well as targeted training for volunteers in Guest

Experience, Small Groups, and Church Finances. You can even set up your own personalized training experiences.

The Resource River will begin to flow rapidly when you clarify vision, elevate the guest experience, simplify the discipleship process, and raise up high-level leaders. Money can be raised, but it can also be wisely invested to produce a return that overflows. Getting more people through the doors, staying, growing, and fulfilling the mission will release an overflow of resources.