Case for Support in a Box

A step by step guide to writing an effective Case for Support

Everything you need to create a compelling Case for Support—Look Inside!
What is a case for support?

• A case for support is an external designed document meant to persuade potential donors to support a particular project or cause.

• The case for support is often instrumental in professionalizing a project or organization, and for honing its selling points to donors in a presentable format.
Let’s start with some sage advice – courtesy of Tom Ahern

*Corporate* communications are about how great the organization is. Favorite pronoun: *we*

*Donor* communications are about how *great* the *donor* is. Favorite pronoun: *you*
Step 1: Before writing, know who you are writing to

You have a project and a motivated donor. Or, you have a worthy project and a few prospects you’re sure will want to know more about your project and invest. You want to write a case for support to begin that conversation.

Decide who your donor/s are. Jot down a donor profile. Make a list of all the different kinds of people that will be reading it—make the best guesses possible. Your language and content will address these questions:

1) Who are our donors or prospects? (ie., alums, non-alums, current donors, in-state, out-of state etc.)
2) What will motivate our donors to give to us?
3) What will our donors need to know in order to give with confidence?
4) What giving opportunities will we offer our donors? (ie., naming opportunities, different levels as in a giving society, other recognition opps.)

Once you answer these questions, you will know if your case is pointed at one very specific donor segment or if your case is meant to be more broad and must address different motivations to give. This allows you to know, in advance, the pieces of information and selling points that you will include to appeal to all of these motivations.
Step 2: Put on your donor/s shoes

Before you start writing, think about **HOW** you will say **WHAT** you need to say:

**The five major motivators of human behavior that make people act:**

- **Fear** (If I don’t help, the negative situation won’t change)
- **Love** (My heart belongs to this cause; this affects me personally; I **HAVE** to invest)
- **Greed** (Naming opportunities? I want ALL the kudos; I **must** be part of this)
- **Guilt** (I’m an alum and I have the means; I **SHOULD** help)
- **Pride** (I’m an alum; this is **MY** college/university; I’m part of the solution)

1. Think about what you know about the donor or prospective donor/s. What do you think will **motivate them emotionally** to invest?
2. What do you know about the project that is **exciting for the donor**?
3. What are the major selling points of the project from the donor’s perspective – if they invest, **what’s in it for them**?
4. Think about what the donor’s questions will be. What are the pitfalls, why wasn’t this done earlier? **What’s the white elephant in the room you know will come up?**
Step 3: Get clear on what is exciting about your case

Once you have a clear idea of **who** you are writing to, you can begin to formulate **how** you will write to them, and to think about what information needs to be included.

Jot down a list of selling points and important aspects of the case that you know, based on the donor profile you created, are most compelling.

**Some example ideas are:**
- The building will heavily increase the ability to recruit better students.
- The program will attract distinguished faculty and put the College of XXXX on the map.
- This will be the first program/building/research center of its kind in the nation.
- The new stadium will increase our national exposure through more televised games.
Step 4: Be ready for potential objections and questions

Jot down a list of questions that the donor might ask while reading. These questions should be hindrances to your ability to persuade. Be sure to answer them all. You may not actually address all of these questions in the case, based on the prospective audience, but this pre-thinking will make sure you do not overlook any looming concerns that the donor might have.

The objective here is to play the skeptic, to get yourself fully prepared to address any objections and to have concise, thought out answers to any issues at the ready.

Pretend that we’re writing a case for a new football stadium. Our questions might include:

1) What’s wrong with the old stadium?
   Answer: the stadium was built in the 1950s and is in disrepair. Many of the seats are broken, the scoreboard is no longer technologically relevant, etc. It is now too small to accommodate the growing interest in the team. A new stadium would increase spectators and revenue—grow exposure to new fan bases and help promote the sport outside of our community. We can use it as a recruiting tool to attract new talent.

2) How will the new stadium make the team better, enhance the UA’s program?
   Answer: the new stadium will bring more money into the program, and will allow for more strategic and compelling recruitment practices. The stadium will act as a home base for athletes and staff, and it will now be easier to strategize and discuss upcoming games in one location. It’s competitive with other PAC12 rival schools and fans like that – it enhances the fan experience. A stadium full of cheering fans can’t help but pump up the team.
Step 5: Know what sections to include

Typically, a Case for Support will include these sections, in this order:

- History and credibility
- Need and urgency
- Mission and values
- Vision/Specific objectives
- What would happen if the you didn’t get the money
- How the donor can help

Here’s how to translate all that into compelling donor centered information:

- History and credibility—Why you (the donor) should/will want to give your money to us
- Need and urgency—Why you should give us your money now
- Mission and values—Why/how our cause aligns with what you care about
- Vision/Specific objectives—How we will use your money to make change you want to see
- What would happen if the you didn’t get the money—Why/how you could be our hero
- How the donor can help—The Ask/be our hero, donate $xxxx today (It may not be appropriate to include a soft or hard ask here. Do what feels appropriate for how you will use the case. If you are including a written proposal, you can put the Ask in that).
Step 6: Just write it

Now that you have a basic outline of what to include and how to speak to your donor, take a look at our more comprehensive writing template to get a further understanding of the content within the sections, and then get started. You can write in units, taking one at a time, or just rough out the whole thing. Just get some ideas on paper. It doesn’t need to be pretty until you are ready to present it to the donor.

Keep in mind: The case is important, but what’s most important is that you understand your project and donor—that you understand the project’s importance and how to align that information with the donor’s motivation for giving.

Good luck, we’ll be cheering for you!
GIFT Center Proposal Writing Team