

Making a Case: Preparing for the Funding Request

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One of the most important functions of fundraising is how to make a case for funding. A case is the compilation of information about the organization, its needs, and its opportunities which will be presented to the prospective donor through a variety of means, ranging from face-to-face conversation to brochures.

A case is a presentation of the compiled information which tells the listener (prospect or donor) why he/she could or should support the cause. Preparing this document takes considerable time and thought because all the appropriate information must be gathered, agreement on the content must be achieved inside the organization as well as by the board and volunteers, an internal case statement which is the foundation of all expressions of the case must be developed, and the case must be customized for all possible donor markets—individuals or groups.

The preparation of a case statement serves various purposes:

1. Bringing internal agreement on what needs exist and how these can be met.
2. Verifying information so that accuracy and credibility are achieved.
3. Achieving support from the organization's staff and leadership.
4. Seeing what gaps in information exist.

Case preparation consists of three steps:

1. Gathering all relevant information about the organization, the cause, and the need for which fundraising is to take place;
2. Compiling this information into one accurate, concise, clear document for internal use, which is the case statement; and
3. Developing case expressions for various purposes and audiences.

A case statement should consist of these parts:

1. Definition of the problem—a description of the problem that exists or what need should be met. Donors cannot and most often will not respond to a simple request that says, “We need money for” They want to know what problem will be solved. However, donors don't give money for the problem; they give money to the next step.
2. The solution—a case statement should be explicit about what will improve, what will be better, what will be different, what will change when money is given to solve the problem or meet the need.
3. Values—it is equally important to explain the value of working toward a solution for the problem. Fundraising is an exchange of values, and explaining the values answers the question of “why is this important to solve, or why should this need be

- met?” In addition, mission statements express values, and this is a good testing point to see if an organization is adhering to its mission.
4. An explanation of what will be done to reach the expected outcomes, who will perform these tasks, when will they be accomplished, and any other detail necessary to understand the case being presented to the donor.

In compiling the information for the case statement, the following documents should be included:

- Mission statement, because this is the underlying philosophy and belief of why the organization exists.
- Goals and objectives of what is to be achieved.
- Description of the programs or activities that will be implemented in order to reach the goals and meet the objectives.
- Qualification of the staff, to show that they are capable of carrying out the programs.
- List of the board members to show who is ultimately responsible for the organization and the fundraising campaign.
- Description of the facilities, if the project or organization is dependent on physical space.
- Numerical and narrative explanations of the budget.
- Success stories that verify the organization is capable of carrying out the goals and objectives.

Once the internal case statement has been prepared with the input of program staff, administration, representative board and volunteers, and in some cases, the clients, case expressions can be developed that will address various audiences. One case expression cannot meet all audience needs. Sometimes a brochure or even a flyer is appropriate. For other instances, the case expression is actually the person interfacing with the donor on a one-to-one basis. The possible case expressions are:

- Brochures.
- Proposals.
- Letters, personalized or for mass mailings.
- Phone conversations, or mass phoning.
- The many uses of the Internet, e-mail, texting.
- Oral presentations to groups.
- One-on-one conversations.

The fundamental case statement, which an organization prepares, is the foundation for approaching prospects and donors for a specific purpose. The preparation of the case statement and case expressions will sometimes expose weaknesses in operations, planning, and project or program implementation. Without a strong case statement that is based on facts as well as carefully analyzed needs for funding and human resources, the fundraiser, whether a full-time professional or a volunteer or a part-time employee, will have a difficult time talking to a prospect or donor about the cause and the need, and bringing the effort to a successful conclusion.