

WRITING A COMPELLING CASE STATEMENT

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Introduction

If Ernest Hemingway had set out to write a Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, he never would have put pen to paper! The task of writing the definitive document that describes your nonprofit organization – the Case Statement – can seem just as daunting. Yet the case statement is a pivotal resource in any fundraising function.

The case statement and its precursor, the case facts outline, are the basic resource documents from which all of your organization's communications may be developed, including the following:

- ***Personal representations for Board members, key volunteers, and professional staff in the form of informal conversations or official speaker presentations.***
- ***Printed materials, such as your organization's basic case statement brochure, foundation grant proposals, personalized solicitation letters, special fundraising project brochures, direct mail and other solicitation materials.***
- ***Media statements, such as press releases and other public announcements.***

A case statement also serves the broader purpose of demonstrating to potential donors and volunteers that your organization has a well managed and clearly articulated plan for the future.

What is a Case Statement?

With more and more nonprofit organizations competing for contributions of both money and time, one role for the case statement is to convince individuals, corporations and foundations to support your organization. A thoughtfully considered case statement, however, does more than communicate your organization's funding needs and dollar goals.

A successful case statement will include the following:

1. Definition of the ***uniqueness*** of your organization's approach to meeting its mission, purpose and goals.
2. Demonstration of the ***merit*** of and ***need*** for your organization's programs and services.
3. Articulation of the most ***compelling*** reasons for anyone to contribute money or time to your organization's specified needs.
4. Evidence of ***sound*** financial planning for your organization's future, including plans for funding your organization's stated objectives and goals.
5. Identification of top volunteer leadership and professional staff responsible for ***governing and directing*** your organization.

6. Indication of the manner in which **contributions** may be made to your organization, the systems established to receive those contributions, and opportunities for donor recognition.

The First Step...Case Facts Outline

The first and most important step in developing an institutional case statement is the case facts outline. The case facts outline incorporates all of the pertinent facts about your organization in a single document, in outline format for ease of reference. This outline serves as the basic internal reference for all communications from your organization.

While the case statement is designed to be a compelling document which encourages support of your organization, the case facts outline is **not** intended to be a persuasive piece. Rather, the case facts outline is a summary of the objective facts and data concerning your organization – a dynamic document that should be updated annually to reflect current information.

We suggest that appropriate professional staff members develop the case facts outline, with final approval by some or all of the governing Board to ensure accuracy and comprehensiveness. In compiling a case facts outline, you should focus your efforts in the following topical areas:

- *Background History*
- *Purpose*
- *Objectives*
- *Volunteer and Professional Leadership*
- *Funding Requirements*
- *Contribution Procedures*
- *Attachments*

The following worksheets are designed to elicit the information you will need to write a compelling case facts outline.

Compiling the Outline: Worksheets

Background History

1. Why and how was our organization first established? _____

2. Who were the original founders of our organization?

3. What are our organization's principal and notable accomplishments in its history to date?

Purpose

1. What is our organization's basic and enduring purpose?

2. What are the merits of that purpose?

3. How is our organization unique in our approach to meeting that purpose? How are we different from other organizations providing similar programs or services?

Objectives

1. What objectives have been undertaken or planned to meet our organization's basic purpose? That is, what are the specific, quantifiable ways in which we plan to meet our purpose, including our programs and services?

2. Why should anyone contribute anything, at any time, toward those objectives?

Volunteer and Professional Leadership

1. What are the qualifications and degree of involvement of the governing Board and other volunteer support groups to meet our organization's stated purpose and objectives?

2. What is the organizational structure of our volunteer groups, including the Board, and the professional staff?

3. What are the qualifications of our professional staff to meet the purpose and objectives stated? Do members of our professional staff have special expertise or experience which make them particularly suitable to implement our organization's programs and services effectively?

Funding Requirements

1. In what specific ways do we demonstrate sound financial planning for the future?

2. What are the specific funding needs required to meet the organization's current, intermediate and long term objectives, including general operating expenses, new and renovated equipment, programs and services, and capital funding needs?

3. What is the rationale for meeting those funding needs? Why are they important?

4. How does our organization intend to meet the funding needs identified, including current, intermediate term and long range plans?

Contribution Procedures

1. What are our organization's procedures for receiving gifts of the following types:

Cash, checks or money orders? _____

Pledges? _____

Bequests? _____

Real property? _____

In-kind gifts? _____

Annuities and other life income contracts? _____

2. What is our organization's federal and state status that qualifies us for tax-deductible contributions and foundation grants?

3. Does our organization receive federal or state government funding?

4. How are contributions to our organization recognized, both publicly and permanently?

Attachments

Since the case facts outline serves as a comprehensive source of information about your organization, the following key documents and materials should be assembled and attached to your organization's case facts outline:

- ☐ Current Board roster, including professional affiliations and other community involvement, as available.
- ☐ Current roster of key advisory and/or support groups, including professional affiliations and other community involvement, as available.

- ☐ Most recent financial statements.
- ☐ Operating budget for the current fiscal year.
- ☐ Brief biographical sketches of founders who are still involved in your organization, other key volunteer leaders, executive director and senior professional staff, as appropriate.
- ☐ Letters of commendation and recognition.
- ☐ Statistical data which quantifies your organization's mission, including a quantitative description of the need for your organization's programs and services as well as the degree to which your organization addresses that need.
- ☐ News articles and other press coverage.
- ☐ Letters of tax-exempt status from appropriate federal and state agencies.
- ☐ List of key major donors, including individuals, foundations and corporations.

Notes:

The Case Statement...A Communications Resource

Once the case facts outline has been compiled, reviewed and approved, you are ready to write the case statement itself. The case statement is merely a condensed, concise and persuasive version of the case facts outline, written in narrative form. Remember that, in contrast to the objective and unadorned nature of the case facts outline, the case statement should “sell” your organization.

Incorporate compelling information from the same topical areas noted in the previous section, emphasizing the following key points:

- ✓ ***Uniqueness of your organization...***
- ✓ ***Merit and need of your programs and services...***
- ✓ ***Compelling reasons for support...***
- ✓ ***Sound financial planning...***
- ✓ ***Evidence of strong governance and direction...***
- ✓ ***Means of making contributions...***

Often, organizations rush to publish a newly developed case statement in printed brochure form. While this can be an effective way to communicate your case to your constituency, it is not the only – or, sometimes, the best – way to disseminate a case statement. Consider the following methods of disseminating your organization’s case statement:

- **Personal representations...**each of us is in contact with hundreds of different people each year, and top community and business leaders may come in contact with many more than average. Given a clear understanding of your mission, goals and priorities, individuals such as governing Board members, key volunteers and professional staff can be most effective “ambassadors” of your organization’s case. These personal representations may be in the form of informal conversations or official speaker presentations.
- **Printed materials...**the specific audience to be addressed and the objectives in addressing that audience should dictate the printed materials to be prepared. These materials might include personalized solicitation letters and special presentations, foundation grant proposals, special fundraising project brochures, and direct mail solicitation materials. You may also wish to produce a case statement brochure with photography, imaginative layout, and color, as appropriate – just be certain that it addresses the specific needs of your organization.

- **Media statements**...press releases and other public announcements should rely on the case statement as a resource document in order to be sure that the facts and message portrayed to the public-at-large are consistent and accurate.
- **Electronic materials**...posting your case statement on a World Wide Web site can be an effective way to convey the needs of your organization, both to those familiar with your cause and to new constituents. In an increasingly Internet-savvy age, your web site will often be the first contact your organization makes with prospective donors. As such, your web site should integrate photography, an intelligent and interesting design, and clarity of information. Always remember to provide clear contact information so that prospective donors and volunteers can easily reach the right people within your organization.

Notes:

A Final Word...

A case facts outline and case statement are, necessarily, written from the perspective of your organization. Keep in mind, however, that like the marketing of any product or service, your organization's case for support will be more persuasive and compelling if it also acknowledges the needs of your potential donors. If you position your organization as one that is effectively and dynamically meeting community needs that potential donors deem important, you will better encourage the investments of both time and money in your organization.