



A Unifying Narrative: Creating a case for support

A capital campaign is a focused fundraising effort carried out over a set period, often several months or even years, to secure a large amount of money for a specific project. The project may be anything from building new facilities, to purchasing land, to completing major renovations or repairs, to purchasing new equipment or establishing an endowment fund. A capital campaign may be one of largest fundraising efforts your organisation undertakes.

Your case for support is the core set of reasons why people should support your campaign. It's like a toolkit containing all the key messages that form the foundation for crafting communications with different supporters in different ways. We are talking about a case for support in the context of a capital campaign. It's great to have a case for support for your organisation as a whole. That then forms the backbone for creating a case for support for specific programmes, activities or projects and the starting point for creating a case for support for any initiative or activity in any income stream.

What is a case for support?

Your case for support is your core fundraising messages. It is the core set of reasons why people should support a particular campaign, project, or your organisation's work in general.

I've heard it described as "*part storytelling* (in the context of bringing the why and what of both your organisation and your project to life), *part business plan* and *part invitation to change the world with you*".

An analogy I like, is your case for support is your fundraising north star – a clear, compelling story that explains your why, what you are doing, the problem you are solving and the change that will result, and how supporters can help make it happen. As we are in the Southern Hemisphere, it's more like your fundraising Southern Cross, guiding your team as they navigate building support.

Why is your case for support important?

Have you ever struggled to explain the difference your organisation makes and what specifically you do and how supporters can help change the world with you? Then you need a case for support. It is the foundation for successfully raising funds.

When you are looking to build support clarity and consistency of core messages is key. When you have a team of people working to do that, it's vital. Whether it's supporting to raise funds for a campaign, project, programme or your organisation, or any other form of support, making it easy for the team through clearly capturing and sharing core messages ensures consistency. Without a strong case for support, each time the team connects with a potential supporter they need to craft what they say, each application, email or piece of supporting material needs to be written from scratch, running the risk of inconsistent messaging.

Your case for support is the unifying narrative, or the backbone of all your fundraising communication.

What it's not

A case for support is not a single document. It is the why (the community need), why now, what you are doing, what will be different, why you, and what you are asking for.

Once you have crafted the elements of your case for support, they are the ingredients anyone in the team can use to craft any supporting document or conversation - design a presentation, complete an application, write a speech for a fundraising event, craft a press release, write a major gift proposal, connecting with someone over coffee.

What are the ingredients?

Get a team together to help craft the case for support – governing group, operations team, governing group.

In order to tap into the three elements – the storytelling, the business plan and the invitation to change the world with you – you need the following in your toolkit.

Start with your what and why

Everything you do has to align with what your organisation does and the difference you are looking to make through the work you do. Show how the campaign connects to your organisation's mission and vision.

Next, your campaign Why

Sometimes with a case for support, we jump straight to the *What* – this is what we are doing and how much we need. In creating your case for support, the most important place to start is *Why*. Always. It gives your campaign meaning and provides context for supporters – you are asking supporters to give or give more, what would compel them to do so?

There are two parts to *Why* – defining the need or problem and explaining why it requires attention now:

What is the need or problem your campaign, programme or project is addressing in your community?

- What evidence do you have that this is a genuine need? How have you gathered that evidence?
- How will this campaign addresses the need?

Why now?

- What makes your mission, campaign or project urgent instead of a 'nice to have'?
- What is at stake? What happens if nothing changes?

The solution – Your What

There is also two parts to *What*:

Specifically, what are you going to do to address the challenge you identified in your Why?

- What is the plan?
- What do you need the funds for?
- How much money do you need? What is the goal?

What difference will the project make when it is successfully implemented?

- Once you have achieved the project what will your community look like as a result?
- What are the short term, medium term and long term positive changes?

Show or explain what success will look like for the people or community you serve in a way that brings the data to life e.g. 'We will provide 500 families with safe housing' rather than 'We will raise \$1 million that will be put towards housing'.

Show how you will make it measurable – use numbers, timelines or benchmarks so supporters can see progress and outcomes.

Why you?

This is all about enabling potential supporters to get to know, like and trust you. To build credibility and confidence.

- Why is your organisation the right one to deliver against this challenge?
- What are your credentials? What have you delivered?
- What are your strengths? What is your point of difference? What evidence do you have?



Image source: Freepik

The ask

What are you asking for from your supporters and potential supporters? How specifically can they support you?

Your ask will change depending on who you are talking to, where and how. The ask you make in a major gift proposal will be different to the asks at a fundraising event. The key is to be specific.

Gather compelling data, quotes and stories

Talking to your strengths, what you have achieved and why your organisation is the one to deliver this project creates part of the picture. Share the statistics and stories to prove it.

Gather stories of your vision and mission in action. Stories of the difference you make now. Gather real examples that support the need or problem you are looking to solve and connect those real examples to what you will be able to achieve when you successfully deliver this project.

Gather testimonials from those you support, families of those you support, volunteers and existing supporters. They are the things that will build trust and credibility.

Make all of this easily available to the team as part of your toolkit, so they can use what they need depending on who they are talking to.

How to use it

Your case for support is a living tool. Test it with trusted people first, both from inside your organisation and external people. Ask for their feedback and make any changes that make it more compelling as you go. Regularly review with the team to share what has worked well and been successful, and where you have had challenges and issues and what you might change to make it better.



Top tips for using your case for support in a campaign

- For all communications and discussions remember you are giving people the opportunity to be involved. Your mindset is vitally important. Know the funds are out there. You just need to give the right people the opportunity to give to connect with them. Not everyone will take up the opportunity. Thank them for taking the time to listen to you and then connect with the next potential supporter.
- Include the 'why' for your campaign at every touch point – what is the problem or need you are addressing and why is it important to do it now. Then you may use all the other elements, or one or two key elements at a time, depending on where and how you are communicating.
- Depending on where someone is in their journey with your campaign – have they just learnt about it, are they getting to know, like and trust your organisation, or are they ready to support – include ways to get to the next stage. Meeting someone for the first time and jumping straight to the ask, without the opportunity to find out more does not always lead to success.
- Balance emotion and evidence. Overwhelming with too much data feels cold, too much emphasis on the story can feel vague. Balance facts with stories.
- Keep it simple, warm and human, avoid jargon.
- Take opportunities to bring documents or conversations to life with images and video. If you're unable to include photos due to client privacy or confidentiality, there are lots of other options. FreePik.com has great illustrations that are free to use (look for License and select 'free'). Canva.com and Unsplash.com also have a range of free illustrated images or group photos.