

MARKETING GUIDE

Breathe Life Into Your Next Donor Campaign How to Balance Emotion with Facts

INTRODUCTION

You've worked with a top-notch fundraising consultant. The feasibility study you commissioned shows that donors are open to your plans for a capital campaign. You're all set to launch the quiet phase of your campaign with your most important major donors but when you unveil your case for support to them, it falls flat—and no one is sure why.

There's a good chance it's because you neglected to share both the details and the dream with your prospective donors. At Mission Minded, we know a strong case for support has to balance reason with emotion—with the right amount of energy thrown in for good measure.

In this guide, we'll show you how to create a case for support that has all the right ingredients for both quiet- and public-phase fundraising. You'll learn why you can't ensure campaign success by stating the need alone and how to use emotion to draw your donors irresistibly into your appeal.

For a successful case for support you'll need:

- A deep understanding of your audiences
- A case that successfully applies this formula:
Urgency + Emotion + Rationale
- A compelling theme
- A campaign brand that complements your organization's brand



1 Meet Your Target Audiences

A sound communications strategy is built from the ground up with your target audiences in mind. Who are you going to ask for money, and what do *they* care about?

Start by developing a list of the 3–5 different categories of people your campaign will target. For example, an independent high school might have three audiences for its campaign: current parents of students who attend the school, parents whose children graduated from the school, and grandparents of current students. A ballet company might have four: major donors who supported the last campaign, major donors who have given only an annual gift, subscribers who have also made modest donations, and subscribers who have never donated.

Remember: the donors in these groups are real people, not just a collection of demographic data. They more you invest in understanding who they are and what they care about, the more successful your appeals to them will be. To help keep messaging on track, we counsel our clients to create a character who can represent each category. Give these characters names, articulate what you love about them, and—just as importantly—what they love about you.

Creating target audience profiles is a valuable exercise. It will make your case stronger as you'll be writing to reach specific individuals instead of a faceless group. As you're developing these characters, ask yourself:

- What is your character's name, age, gender, occupation, family structure?
- What are their interests and hobbies?
- Who influences them?
- Where do they go for information?
- What do they care about?
- How do they dress and where do they shop?
- What kind of car do they drive? Or do they rely on public transportation?
- What is their relationship or potential relationship to your organization?
- How will they feel about themselves after giving to your campaign?

As an example, here's the profile of Adelaide Baxter, a character we helped a performing arts organization client create for its capital campaign:



Mrs. Baxter is a force around town. She's a passionate patron of the arts and a consultant to many cultural organizations. Her hourly rate is reasonable, but that's because she's not in any need of money.

Mrs. Baxter is from a well-to-do family and as her best friend would say, "The first time around, Addie married well and divorced better. It was his loss."

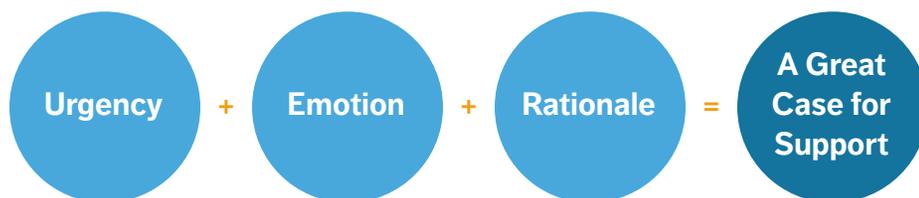
Recently widowed from husband number two, Mrs. Baxter is now a single parent to two children, both in college. She drives a hybrid Lexus and takes her iPad everywhere, using it to read *The New York Times* and *The New Yorker*. She is more interested in impact than recognition. Her relationship with us to date has been minimal, but she's always interested in helping an organization that's not (yet) top dog, so we're one group she's got her eye on.

Now, imagine writing your case with Mrs. Baxter in mind instead of just "major donors with capacity." Picturing her will help you home in on exactly what your most important audience members need to hear. It paves the way for a case that inspires giving.

2 Calculate Your Case Formula

Urgency is required for a successful campaign, but conveying it appropriately is tricky. Urgency shows the donor why their money is needed now. And donors give to solve immediate problems or to take advantage of timely opportunities. Without an urgent need, their drive to give will be minimal. That said, a sky-is-falling appeal could make your organization appear to be on shaky ground, so don't overdo it.

To ensure your case moves people to donate, it should follow this equation:



Why now? What's the distinct need that's driving you to conduct this campaign?

Why should we care? What can you tap into that will inspire the right emotions in your audience members?

What's the logic behind your fundraising efforts? What's the reason to believe this campaign will make a difference?

Urgency

Examples: opportunities to upgrade facilities, a challenge grant, an institutional milestone tied to the end of an ambitious strategic plan.

Emotion

Examples: supporting the marginalized, uniting the community, giving donors peace of mind that the institution they love will be there for their grandchildren.

Rationale

Examples: expanding services, establishing an endowment, rising costs of real estate. One rationale the Los Angeles LGBT Center used for its recent campaign, for example, was that they had successfully completed capital campaigns of a similar size in the past, and they resulted in significant benefits to those they serve.



Not sure how to make your case urgent?

Try this exercise we share with our clients:

Write down the answer to this question 10 times:

If we don't reach our campaign goal _____ will happen.

Now answer this question 10 times:

When we do reach our campaign goal _____ will happen.

If you're like many of our clients, you found that the first few answers you came up with weren't as illuminating as those that came later. Take this exercise to your next campaign meeting and ask everyone to try it. Share your insights and make a note of them for when you start writing your case.

3 Develop a Great Campaign Theme

Why do you need a campaign theme? In a word: focus. When you distill your campaign into a core idea, donors will quickly understand its merit. What are the key traits of a compelling theme? We work with our clients to develop themes that meet as many of the following criteria as possible:

Be Easy to Say

- A** You want your campaign to be talked about—and with excitement. If the theme is too long, too academic, or too literal, that won't happen. "Building Brilliance" was the theme we chose for Crystal Springs Uplands School's campaign, for example. The play on words (crystal/brilliance) plus the alliteration make this not only engaging to say, but memorable, too.

Engage the Reader

- B** If the theme sounds as if it's all about you, switch it up so that it's about the donor and/or your beneficiaries whom your donors care about instead. By involving the donor right away, it's easier for them to see themselves as part of the story—and care. There are many ways to engage your audiences. One is to use a command, as Peninsula Open Space Trust did: "Heart of the Redwoods Campaign: Save the forest for the trees."

Be Easy to Understand

- C** A case for support theme is not the place to say everything or to put off your audience with jargon. Get to the point and write the way people really talk, the way Performing Arts Workshop did with "Give Young People the Education They Need and Deserve."

Use Visual Language

- D** "This is our day!" conjures up the San Francisco Day School campus and creates a sense of urgency. With "our day," the reader imagines not only the physical school, but the community of which they are a part.

Evoke Emotion

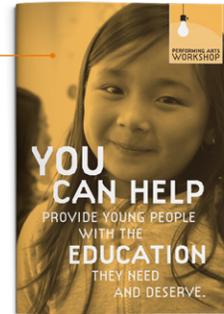
- E** Santa Rosa Community Health, Unite in Heart, Health, + Justice. This theme ties an emotional topic—justice—to what the organization does—health. The more your donor is moved when reading your theme, the more likely they are to dig into the content.



A



B



C



D



E





A Great Case for Support: Case Study

When the Los Angeles LGBT Center* had the chance to buy a building next to its existing campus and thereby enhance its service to its community, the urgency was clear: buy the building before someone else did or lose it forever. Not all situations are so black and white, but if you can identify the urgency and—even better—tie it to your organization’s values, you’ll be well-positioned to grab the interest of your community members and stimulate their giving.

Once you’ve established the urgent need your campaign addresses, beware of overstuffing your case with technical information. Most cases, especially capital and endowment cases, err on the side of being highly detail-oriented. Nonprofits reason that their most important prospective donors are likely to be those who are already close to their work. These donors know the struggles and they understand the needs and opportunities a successful campaign will address. So, writing with insiders in mind, the case jumps directly to why the organization needs the money. But that’s a mistake; even insider audiences need to be engaged emotionally before they’ll be attentive to the rationale you present.

*Formerly the L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center

4 Define Your Personality

You sit down to draft your case for support. You’ve got your characters written and in mind. You’re clear on the emotional, rational, and urgent nature of your appeal. You’ve got your theme. Now, what’s the *personality* of your narrative?

You can find the answer to this question by looking at the personality of your organization and making sure your case’s personality reflects it. How are you trying to be perceived by those who matter most to your success? Are you serious and forthright? Warm and reliable? Whatever the answer is, be sure to create a case that reinforces the personality you want your organization to have. Your case shouldn’t feel as though it doesn’t fit with other communications you publish. Make the voice consistent with who you really are. It’s okay to stretch here—you do want your donors to feel some sense of excitement about this initiative. Just don’t go so far that your case doesn’t feel like part of the larger institution.

If you’ve done your homework, thought deeply about your audiences, and crafted a case that balances reason, emotion, and urgency, your donors will want to support you in achieving your goals. Following these steps will ensure that they can contribute to your success with both their heads and their hearts. And that’s a sustainable gift in every way.

Learn More

Mission Minded is a branding firm that works exclusively with nonprofit organizations.

We believe that a brand that sets you apart is essential to a nonprofit’s success. Every day we guide nonprofits to uncover the big, bold idea that will attract more people to their work. Because in today’s world, a worthy mission is not enough. You’ve got to communicate what makes you unique at every opportunity.

Our clients successfully raise more money and attract the support they need to achieve their goals. To find out how Mission Minded can help your organization, call us today at 415-990-9360.