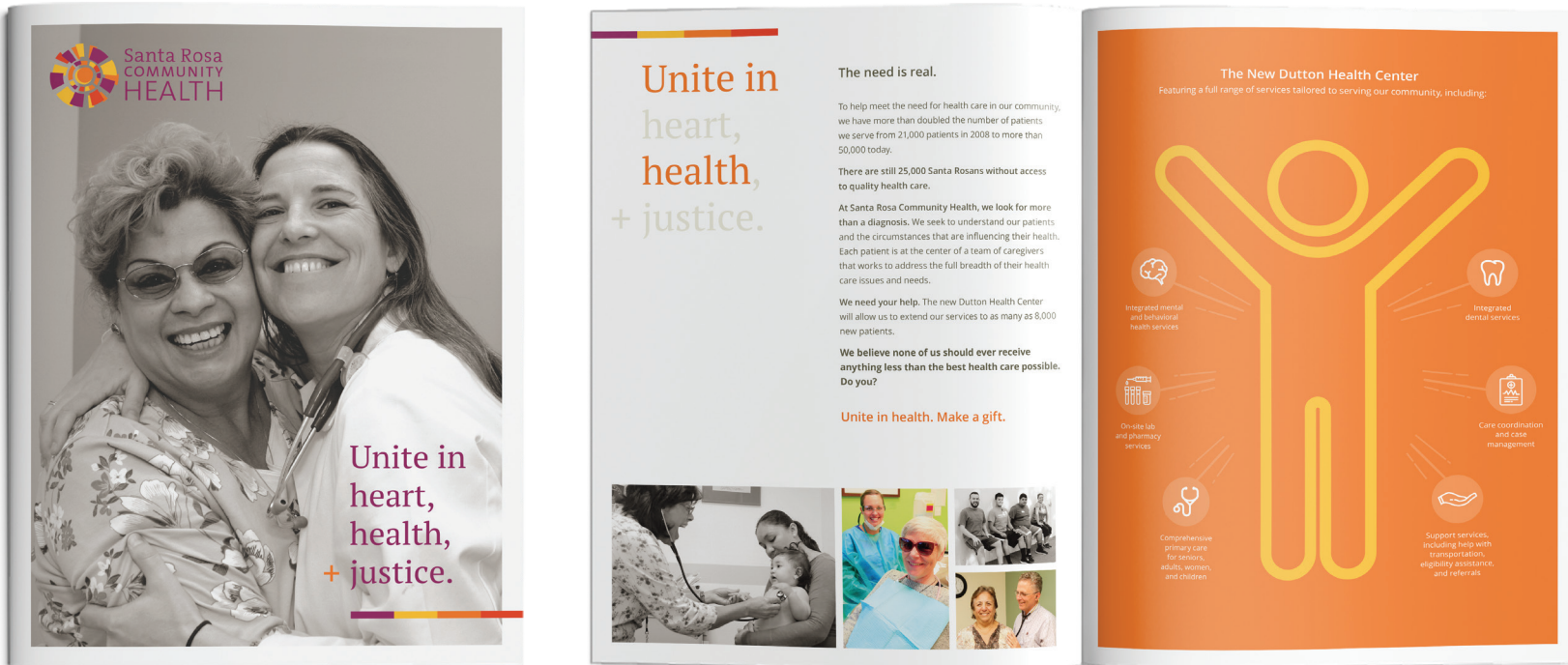


# Make Your Case for Donations

## Create a Standout Case for Support

## INTRODUCTION



You've done it. You've finally landed that coveted meeting with your next potential major donor—the one who can finance an important new initiative for your organization. You've researched them. You know their likes and dislikes.

Now comes the big question:  
**How do you make your case?**

Let us show you. In this guide, we'll give you a detailed road map and a handy summary of tips for making your case great.

## A Case for Support: What Is It?

Professional and volunteer fundraisers have an array of tools at their disposal. Among them is the case for support: a document that lays out both rational and emotional arguments for why someone should support a cause or organization. Your case for support (also called a *case statement*) is a document that presents a convincing rationale in a compelling way for supporting your organization. It persuades your donor to make a significant financial contribution because it helps them to identify with your mission and be riveted by your story.



### The Basics

A case for support can take many forms. It might be a simple, 3–5 page appeal printed on your organization's letterhead, or it could be more sophisticated, using great storytelling, design, photography, color, and typography to strengthen your case's emotional appeal and credibility. Some organizations also employ video or web tools to make their fundraising case come alive. Regardless of format, all good cases have the same essential ingredients:

- A statement of the problem that balances urgency, rationale, and emotion
- An outline of program goals
- Information on how to give and direct encouragement to do so
- Supporting information

### The Power of Design

At Mission Minded we know that powerful design strengthens the appeal of a case for support.

Consider this line of text alone: “Dream with us.” With whom? It’s a nice invitation, but on its own it doesn’t tap into the hearts and souls of the donors it was written to engage.

Now look at the same line in context, on the cover of the case for support Mission Minded designed for the Los Angeles LGBT Center. The appeal jumps off the page. When the message is combined with imagery that uses color, photos, and graphics in a fresh way, it becomes urgent to the reader. And the line “Dream with us” takes the emphasis off the organization and puts it on the people it serves.

# Anatomy of a Case

## Introduce Yourself

Your case's introduction serves three essential purposes:

- To establish your organization's purpose
- To engage supporters in the challenges your organization faces
- To demonstrate the rewards of becoming part of your organization's success in meeting those challenges

To do these three things well, your case has to have the right balance of urgency, rationale, and emotion. It can't be all about you—and it can't be boring. Here's what you do:

## Tell a Story

The most powerful introductions take the form of a personal story: the story of a service recipient, visitor, or patron whose experience is particularly representative of your organization's promise.

The introduction's job is to help the reader identify with this individual. To that end, the *least* effective form is, as in the example below, the dispassionate third-person:

*"The Help Agency provides support for young adults who are living on the streets."*

Compare that to the power of directly addressing your audience:

*"Have you met Sarah? You may have seen her on the streets, her bruises hidden behind her matted hair, her handwritten sign asking for help. Today, Sarah helps herself and many others, and she needs your support to make their dreams a reality, too."*

The word "you" directly addresses the reader and pulls them in.

**A genuine human story makes your whole organization come alive. It illustrates the types of problems your constituents face, your organization's role in improving lives, and how donors will feel when they get involved.**

## Set the Stage

A brief discussion of your organization's history creates the context for your appeal. In particular, note the ways in which your innovative solutions have not only helped the lives of individuals, but helped introduce a whole new type of service.

This should not be a litany of organizational milestones—this isn't a retrospective. Make it a vibrant account of the impact you've made over the years. Your successes give donors confidence in your ability to use their money wisely.

## Skip the Mission Statement (Really)

If you've spent time, effort, and diplomatic capital putting together an effective mission statement, it's probably important to you. And, of course, your instinct is to use it in your case for support...but resist. **It doesn't have fundraising impact.** Instead, *demonstrate* your mission through the stories you tell. On the other hand, if you have a Belief Message, now is a great time to put it in writing.

## State the Problem

This may be the most important task for a case for support. This section must contain strong descriptions of the problems your organization exists to solve. But don't just talk about the problems your organization faces; highlight the issues that caused your organization to be created in the first place.

Talk about rates of teen homelessness, abandonment, and abuse nationwide and in your city. Show how access to the arts enriches the community and sparks the collective imagination. Detail a problem that needs answers and needs them now: Urgent Action Required.





## Avoid Jargon

The language you and your colleagues typically use may not be familiar to your donors, so write your case using accessible English. Avoid insider language, acronyms, and unnecessary abbreviations.

## Bring Your Statistics to Life

If you need to share statistics to lay out the problem fully, use them sparingly and make them meaningful. Consider this example: “There are 1,600 homeless youth in San Francisco at any given time.” Now read the same data described this way: “Every day in San Francisco, a population of teenagers equal to the enrollment of two high schools walks the streets homeless.” Information becomes compelling when it evokes an image in your reader’s mind.

## Outline Your Program Goals

Take the reader from being engaged with the problem your organization addresses to appreciating the solutions you present. In this section, show how you operate in order to solve the problem—describe the tangible benefits and impact of what you do. When you show how uniquely effective your organization’s solutions are, you plant the idea that with additional resources you can do even more.

## Present Your Fundraising Needs

Earlier, when stating the problem, you focused on challenges facing the world. This section continues that story by outlining the specific programs you run that require support, showing where donor dollars are needed and how they’ll be spent. You’re setting the stage for the whole purpose of your case for support: asking for a donation.

## Ask

It’s time. You’ve given your reader personal stories, summarized a problem that needs solving, and presented your organization as the one that can solve it. You’ve shown your organization for what it is and what it could be. It’s time to ask for funds.

Asking for money can be tricky, but the most important thing is to be direct. Be clear that you’re asking for financial support and be specific about the level you have in mind. Link gift levels

with specific outcomes, such as: “With your \$1,000 donation, our organization will reach out to 50 new kids and give them the guiding hand they need. With your \$25,000 donation, our organization will add job counseling to the list of important services we already provide.”

## Show Them HOW

Make it clear how readers can donate and make it easy: provide your contact information, website, and social media addresses at the end of your case.

## Special Inserts

Some things are most effectively (and more cost-effectively) inserted separately from your case for support. These include up-to-the-minute, personalized, or changeable

elements—recent news coverage of your organization; material uniquely suited to the donor’s giving preferences; your board of directors or volunteer list, etc.

If there are additional benefits to supporting your organization, such as special recognition in your annual report, access to members-only programs, or a thank-you premium for your donor’s gift, consider including that information as a separate insert as well.

In other words, consider writing your case for support to be long-lived (holding true for five years, for example) and add the other elements as inserts, if and when you need them. You’ll cut costs by printing your case in larger numbers, without sacrificing individualization or perishable information.

**We recommend designing your brochure in such a way that your request for donations can be customized for particular donors.**



# 6 Ways to Make It Great

## 1 Create Urgency

Donors want to know that their money is needed to solve real problems, right now, and that their donations will have a real impact.

## 2 Write a Narrative

Appeal to your readers' emotions with a story, then back up your request with the rationale. Tell them why a donation makes sense.

## 3 Be Specific

Identify why the money is needed and how the world will be a better place because of the donor's gift.

## 4 Picture a Person

Write the case as if you were writing to one person, someone you know, not to the general public. Think about how you would speak to that individual to convince them to make the gift. Think of it as a one-on-one interaction.

## 5 Make It Pop

Design your brochure to pass the I'm-too-busy-to-read test. Even if the reader never dips into the main text, they should get the gist. Use powerful photos and other design elements to tell the story.

## 6 Ask for Money

We've seen clients get shy about asking for money, but this is the *point* of your case for support. The case should say in no uncertain terms that you are asking the reader to donate now. (You may customize your "ask" with a letter or an in-person appeal, but the body of the case must still ask people to give.)



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## Testing the Case

Testing your case for support can be as simple as meeting with several of your top donors to seek feedback. Have them read the case and then ask them specific questions:

- Does this case make you want to support our work or program?
- Where is the case strongest? Where is it weakest?
- What specific changes would you recommend?
- How did the case make you feel?
- Did you feel as if the case spoke to you personally?
- Do you think people will want to give after reading it?
- Do you sense the urgency of this appeal?

## How to Use Your Case

A printed or electronic case for support can be used in a number of ways, which makes it a smart investment:

- As part of your request to meet with a donor
- As a discussion guide during conversations with donors
- As a leave-behind after a donor meeting
- As a stand-alone piece at a major donor event

Your case for support tells a story that bowls readers over and makes them want to donate. It helps lay the groundwork for your appeal, strengthens your pitch, and keeps you in your donor's mind long after the meeting is over.

**Beyond the ideas offered here, we know that a nonprofit that understands and leverages its brand is in the best position to achieve its goals. We hope you'll use this guide to create an effective case for support and attract the donations your organization deserves.**



## 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.