

Breathe Life Into Your Next Donor Campaign

How to Balance Emotion with Facts

INTRODUCTION

You've worked with a top-notch fundraising consultant. Your feasibility study showed your donors open and interested in your capital campaign plans. You're ready to launch the quiet phase of your campaign with your most important major donors. But when you do, your case for support falls flat—and no one is sure why.

A good case balances reason with emotion, with the right amount of energy thrown in for good measure. In this paper we'll show you how to create a quiet or public-phase case that has all the right ingredients.

You'll learn why stating the need alone won't ensure campaign support, and how to use emotion to draw your donors into an appeal that's irresistible.

For a good case you'll need:

- A clear and deep understanding of your audiences
- A case that successfully uses this formula:
Urgency + Emotion + Rationale
- A compelling theme
- A clearly defined personality for your campaign that complements your organization



1 Meet Your Target Audiences

First, you need to develop a sound communications strategy based on your target audiences. Who are you going to ask for money, and what do *they* care about?

Develop a list of the 3-5 different kinds of people you will be targeting for your campaign. For example, an independent high school might have three targets for its campaign: current parents of students who attend the school, past 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 only given an annual gift, subscribers who have also made modest donations, and subscribers who have never made a donation.

Remember to consider your donors not as a collective group, but as individual people. Get to know them. We counsel our clients to create a character representative of one person in each category. Articulate what you love about them and, as importantly, what they love about you.

It's a valuable exercise that will make your case stronger when you write for these specific individuals and not a generic group. Ask yourself:

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

Here's a character, Adelaide Baxter, we helped one of our clients, a performing arts organization, 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; she doesn't consult for 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—twenty years later she's still a knockout, stepping out of her hybrid Lexus."

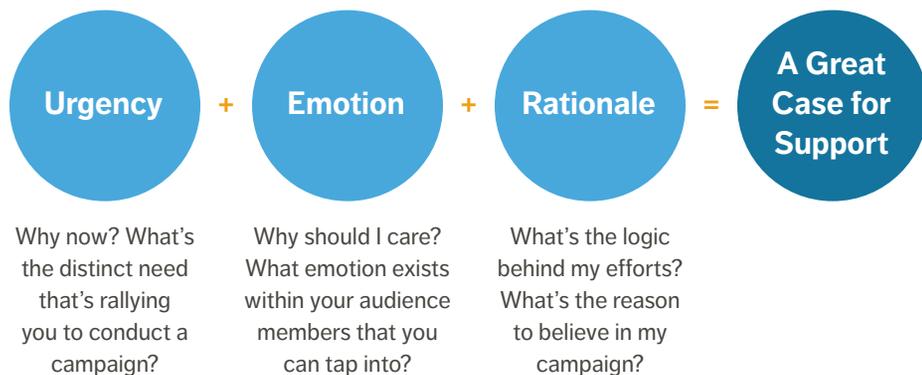
Widowed recently, Mrs. Baxter is a single parent to two children, both in college. She takes her iPad everywhere and uses it to keep up with *New York Times* and the *New Yorker*. She is more interested in impact than she is in recognition. Her relationship with us to date has been minimal, but she's always interested in helping an organization that's not (yet) top dog, so we're one group she's got her eye on.

Imagine writing your case for Mrs. Baxter instead of "major donors with capacity." Can you tell reading her profile how much better your case will be? Creating a detailed profile allows you to hone in on exactly what your most important audience members want to hear, paving the way for a case that inspires giving.

2 Calculate Your Case Formula

Urgency is required for a successful campaign, but showcasing it is tricky. Urgency shows the donor why the money is needed now. Donors give to solve problems or create opportunities. Without an urgent need, the drive to give will be minimal. However, a sky-is-falling ask could make you appear unsteady.

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



Urgency

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

Emotion

Examples here are supporting those who have been marginalized, or giving donors peace of mind that the institution they love will be there for their grandchildren.

Rationale

Examples here are due diligence, costs, etc. For the Los Angeles LGBT Center, a point of rationale was that they had successfully completed capital campaigns of a similar magnitude in the past, with great benefits to those they serve.



Sierra Club Case for Support. Created by Mission Minded.

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 weren't as illuminating as the later ones. Take this exercise to your next campaign meeting and ask everyone to try it. Share your insights and make a note of them. You'll use these later when you start writing.

3 Develop a Great Campaign Theme

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

Be easy to say

- A** You want your campaign to be talked about. And with excitement. If it's too long, too academic, or too literal, that won't happen. Building Brilliance is the theme for Crystal Springs Uplands School's campaign. The play on words (Crystal and Brilliance) plus the alliteration makes this not only easy to say, but memorable, too.

Engage the reader

- B** If the theme sounds like it's all about you, switch it up to be all about the donor and/or your beneficiaries that your donors care about. Involving the donor right away so they see themselves as part of the story is a must. There are many ways to do this. One of them is to use a command (Heart of The Redwoods Campaign: Save the Forest for the Trees, Peninsula Open Space Trust). By telling people what to do, the donor sees right away how they can be part of it.

Be easy to understand

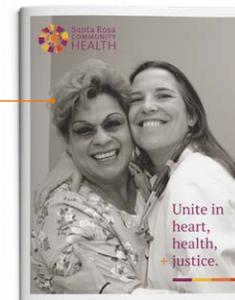
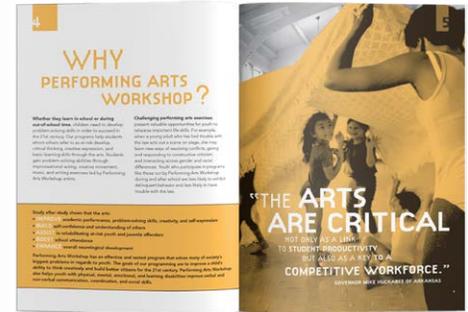
- C** Be direct and get to the point. Avoid jargon and use language that sounds like people really talk: Give Young People the Education They Need and Deserve, Performing Arts Workshop.

Use visual language

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

Invoke emotion

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





A Great Case for Support: Case Study

When the Los Angeles LGBT Center (formerly the LA Gay & Lesbian Center) had the chance to buy a building next to its existing campus to enhance services to its community the urgency was clear: Buy the building now before someone else does, or we lose it forever. Not all instances will be so clear, but if you can identify the urgency and—even better—tie it to the values of your organization, you'll be well-positioned to grab the interest of your community members and stimulate giving.

Once you've established the urgent need your campaign seeks to address, beware of crowding your case with too much technical information. Most cases, especially capital and endowment, err on the side of being too rational. Nonprofits reason that their most important donors to a campaign are likely to be people 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 the case gets right to the point: here's why we need the money and here's what we'll do with it. But that's a mistake.

4 Define Your Personality

You sit down to draft the case. You've got your characters top of 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?

The answer to this question can be found by looking closely at the personality of your organization. Make sure your case complements it. How are you trying to be perceived by those who matter most to your success? Are you serious and forthright? Warm and friendly? 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 like it doesn't fit with other communications you publish. Make the voice consistent with who you really are. It's ok to stretch here—you do want your donors to feel some sense of excitement with this initiative. But don't stretch 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 head and their heart. And that's a sustainable gift in every way.

Learn More

Mission Minded is a branding firm that works exclusively with nonprofits, independent schools, and foundations. We believe you only reach your highest potential if people understand the importance of your work—not just what you do, but why it matters.

Every day we partner with clients like San Francisco Opera, Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, and the Denver Art Museum to help them determine the brand—or reputation—for which they want to be known. Then we help them bring that brand to life through key messages, logo design, web design, and more.

As a result, 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.