

**The Goettler Series**  
*To Advance*  
*The Business of Philanthropy*

# 4

## **The Case for Support**

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*How it Can Position  
Your Institution for Success*

## ***The Goettler Series***

*This article is one of a series on what we at Goettler Associates consider to be the essential elements of fund raising and institutional development today.*

*We have developed this series in response to interest expressed by our clients and our colleagues in the field.*

*One must, however, always exercise caution in writing an article as a guide or “how-to” piece. While the article addresses general principles, each philanthropic institution finds itself in different circumstances.*

*We like to think that one of the qualities that distinguishes Goettler Associates in the fund-raising field is our recognition of this fact: that each institution, each campaign, each situation is different, and that each requires the experience and skills of a team of professionals to listen, learn, analyze and interpret — and then to organize and carry out the strategy appropriate to the specific circumstances.*

*On the other hand, we also recognize the need to increase awareness of the time-tested principles of successful fund raising and to advance the “state of the art,” so to speak. We intend this series to be an important contribution in this respect.*

*This series may also help you understand how we think and how we approach fund development and advancing our philanthropic sector. We hope that it will provoke questions — and that you’ll call us for answers.*

# **The Case for Support**

*How It Can Position Your  
Institution for Success*

**T**here is widespread understanding that the “Case for Support” is a foundation of successful fund raising. But the term means different things to different people, so any discussion of the “case for support” must begin by establishing shared understanding. Consider some of the widely varying opinions we’ve encountered:

- ✓ The president of a private university who considered the “case” to be an impressive glossy brochure that would tell prospective donors everything they needed to know in order to make a gift to the university.
- ✓ The executive director of a human service agency who thought the document would move prospective donors to tears as they reached for their checkbooks.
- ✓ The board chair at a church-related elementary school who intended to submit the case to local foundations in lieu of crafting individual grant applications.

***A case for support . . . states what your institution hopes to accomplish with the funds to be raised, to persuade donors that support of your institution is consistent with personal goals.***

- ✓ The director of a county historical society who was counting on the document to accomplish all of the above even while it recounted the entire history of the institution and the region!

In each instance, the case was expected to do *so many* things that it could not do any *one* of them well. Other times, *too little* is expected of the case for support. The document must be more than a mere recitation of an institution’s needs, especially if it hopes to set the organization and its fund-raising campaign apart from competitors in the philanthropic marketplace.

### **So what is a case for support?**

In its most basic form, it is a philanthropic investment prospectus: a simple, typed document which states, in clear language, what your institution hopes to accomplish with the funds to be raised. Most often, a case for support is associated with capital campaigns— where it

is certainly critical. But more and often, organizations with successful fund-raising programs are finding that the **yearly** discipline of writing (or updating) their case for support enhances the annual campaign, planned giving efforts, major giving program, and special events.

The process of writing and approving the case ensures that the organization maintains a marketplace perspective<sup>1</sup> in all of its fund-raising endeavors.

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***If you can demonstrate how your institution can fulfill a potential donor's aspirations, you'll have the foundation for a successful program.***

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We believe that an effective case for support is written from the perspective of the potential donor, to persuade him or her that financial support of your institution is consistent with the donor's personal goals. If you can uncover what a potential donor needs and wants, and then show how your institution can fulfill those aspirations, you'll have the foundation for a successful program.

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<sup>1</sup> to learn more about this approach to development, please request a copy of volume 3 in *The Goettler Series*, "The Marketplace Perspective."

When you maintain this marketplace perspective, "selling"—in the form of persuasion and manipulation—becomes unnecessary, because the donor shares the institution's goals and is prepared to invest generously in achieving them.

### **What are the characteristics of an effective case for support?**

Whatever the length or format, an effective case for support will meet the following criteria:

- ✓ The case presents the fund-raising opportunity as an **investment** which is consistent with the donor's values and interests.
- ✓ The case does not limit itself to the institution. The most effective cases for support examine issues in society as thoroughly as they describe the institution's programs.
- ✓ The case is accurate. Any claims are fully supported.
- ✓ The case is both rational and emotional. Often, human anecdotes appeal to the heart while statistical data reassure the head.
- ✓ The case is **memorable**—which is to say that it is brief, to the point, well organized, and meaningful.
- ✓ The case reads with a sense of **urgency**, so that the donor is convinced to make a gift quickly.
- ✓ The case evokes positive feelings. It is based on the strengths of the institution, not its "**needs**."

## What does the case for support contain?

It offers enough **history** to convince the donor that your organization has a credible tradition of fulfilling its mission. Your institution's history is also relevant if it reminds the potential donors of their long association with your programs. But use caution so that the case does not become an encyclopedic re-telling of your institution's entire past.

Your institution does not exist in a vacuum, so you must present any relevant information about **your environment**—the social, geographic, economic, and political factors that affect you, those whom you serve, and your prospective donors.

It features a **description** of the distinctive services or programs you provide, and how they have an impact on those whom you serve. It also describes the opportunity to improve these services—and enhance quality of life—through a successful campaign.

It concludes with the **fund-raising goal**, and the potential donor's role in helping to achieve it.

Depending on the complexity of your organization and your campaign goals, this information may be stated succinctly in a few pages, or may require a lengthy document supported by numerous addenda. In an era of word-processing and desktop publishing, the case for support can be an attractive, polished



### A Note About “Needs”

How many times have we heard a well-meaning colleague lament “*if only the donors understood how much we need more money...?*”

The fact is that most successful organizations don't focus on their own needs. Rather, they identify problems in their community, then demonstrate how a donor can join in responding.

In many cases, the fund-raising objective can also meet a donor's personal desires, such as the daughter of a heart attack victim who helped to fund the construction of a cardiac research center.

When preparing a case for support, it's best to assume that your organization *has no needs*, but your donors do!



document, although it's not necessary that it be typeset and printed in four colors. In fact, presenting the case for support to key prospects as a document in progress can build their ownership by making them feel like “insiders.”

## Who is the audience for the case for support?

The audience for the case for support is relatively small. Many more people will be exposed to the marketing materials that are derived from the case than will read the actual source document. To define the target audience, ask the following questions:

- ✓ *Who is our prospective donor?*
- ✓ *Will we appeal to a broad audience, or a closely knit institutional family?*
- ✓ *What is the donor's connection to the institution?*
- ✓ *What are the donor's most basic concerns and greatest aspirations?*

Unlike much popular and journalistic writing, the case is not written to appeal to “the lowest common denominator.” The primary audience consists of those who can have the greatest impact on fund-raising success: major gift prospects and volunteer leaders. Recent research suggests that people who participate in philanthropy have become more diverse in age, and cultural heritage, but share one dominant trait: they tend to be highly educated. Quoting these leaders in the copy can add even more weight and interest to the case, and also encourages them to become more involved in the campaign.

Perhaps the most important audience is composed of those who participate in the process of researching, writing, reviewing and approving the document, including leaders from the volunteer community and staff members. In addition, other fund-raising leaders will be asked to read the document as they are recruited, and some foundations will request a copy as they consider grant applications.

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Recently, one of our associates met with a well-known leader in an eastern city to gather information for a case for support.

As the interview began, the leader responded, “John, have you ever received a phone call from a donor who said ‘I found your case for support on my way to work, read it word-for-word, and would like to make a gift’?”

Eventually, the leader developed a keen interest in the project, made a significant gift to the campaign and became a key volunteer, but his point should be noted.

Don't be discouraged to realize that few if any prospects will make a gift based on a single reading of the case for support. It is far more likely that a generous gift will be obtained by someone (likely a volunteer) who prepared for the solicitation by reading the case for support and restating it to the prospect in his or her own words. That is why the case for support should be considered a resource document rather than a marketing tool. It's also why the process of creating the case for support can be as important as the document itself.

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### ***Building Donor Involvement through the Case for Support***

One of the most important processes in any campaign is the human process: getting the right people to feel more involved with an institution, to identify with it, to feel a growing sense of ownership of the institution and its plans for development. Finally, it must gain their commitment to the campaign as volunteers and donors.

The benefits of this process, when it's carried out consciously and systematically, go far beyond the winning of the campaign. The positive regard and commitment of the key people among your donor constituency is, in the long run, a more enduring and significant result than the raising of money. It provides your institution with the basis for a strong, sustained long-range development program.

### **What are the benefits of the case for support process?**

The process of writing the case for support can be an important tactic in your overall strategy to gain the authentic involvement and commitment of key people in your donor constituency. By involving these key individuals in the development of the case, and by writing the case so that it reflects their values and aspirations, the process of writing the case for support will:

- ✓ Involve influential community leaders in the formation of your plans. This is the first step in cultivating their involvement as a volunteer, and ultimately their gift.
- ✓ Build a sense of ownership among those who are involved in the process. Ownership leads naturally to volunteer advocacy and financial support.



- ✓ Assess your organization's image (external and internal), and reveal strengths and weaknesses.
- ✓ Secure agreement and understanding of the campaign's objectives among staff, board, volunteer advisors, and other influential leaders.
- ✓ Position your institution as one that listens and responds to the community.
- ✓ Maintain your focus on the goals and aspirations of the donor, rather than the needs of the institution.

These benefits were realized when a zoo in the southeast set out to raise funds for the dynamic master plan that had been created by the executive director and board working with a renowned architect. The community's most affluent and influential leaders were not represented on the board, and needed to be brought into the process. So the zoo set out to obtain the opinions and recommendations of these key leaders and reflect them in the case for support. During one interview, a respected businessman expressed a personal interest in a particular species of gorilla. As plans for the zoo took shape, the great ape exhibit became a priority for the first phase of development.

The zoo's fund-raising counsel considered this experience to be a critical factor in the executive's later decision to serve as chairman

of the campaign, and in his corporation's commitment of the first—and largest—gift to the institution.

Even those the institution already considers "close" to its development program can be brought closer in this way.

A community hospital had an enviable record of providing advanced medical care even though it was in a small Midwestern town. One leading resident of the community who also served on the hospital's foundation board had demonstrated her commitment to the area by starting and nurturing several local businesses. Yet, she had never associated the presence of a distinguished hospital with the community's economic and social viability.

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When this was made the central thrust of the case for support, with the close involvement of the business leader cited, she became an "owner" and an enthusiastic advocate of the case. And she volunteered to present it to the community's other business leaders during the crucial leadership cultivation phase of the campaign. As a result, several individuals with no previous connection to the hospital became committed volunteers.



### **An exercise in looking through the donor's eyes:**

Which of the following statements would be valid from the donor's perspective in a case for support for a liberal arts college?

*"Students are well-prepared to assume positions of responsibility in the public and private sectors."*

*"The fine and performing arts programs, lecture series, and athletic events strengthen the cultural fabric of the community."*

*"The faculty and administrators are crowded into a dated, uncomfortable facility and need more modern offices."*

*"Sound facilities and a strong endowment will help us attract the best and brightest students and sustain our tradition of excellence."*

**Answer:** any of these are valid if they represent the heartfelt beliefs of potential donors, although it would be unusual to find a donor with a genuine interest in the comfort of staff.



### **What are the steps in the case for support process?**

These are the steps we recommend in the development of a market-oriented case for support:

1. Review the results of any market research, such as the planning study,<sup>2</sup> in order to determine:
  - a) The existing perceptions and attitudes of the donor community toward your institution;
  - b) Donor motivations—what are the challenges and aspirations of the donor community that your institution can address through this campaign?
2. Form a Case for Support Advisory Committee. Throughout this process, there are numerous tasks which must be accomplished by you, members of your staff, or key volunteers. It is essential that working relationships be established early in the process, and realistic expectations developed.

To the extent that the committee includes representatives of key donor constituencies, it can also serve as a "sounding board" to ensure that the document maintains a marketplace perspective and does not succumb to the temptation of becoming too inwardly focused.
3. Accumulate factual documentation to support any claims which are made in the case for support. These will fall into three broad categories:

<sup>2</sup>to learn more, please refer to volume 2 in *The Goettler Series*, "The Planning Study: Foundation for a Successful Campaign."

- a) those that describe your institution’s strengths, such as applications to the United Way, Institute for Museum Services, or other grant makers; accreditation documents; annual reports; marketing or recruiting materials. And don’t forget one of the most critical resources: your mission statement;
- b) justification for the goals of the fund-raising program, such as architectural plans, budget data, and strategic planning documents; and
- c) information on the community that you serve—the local economic development authority, tourist council, or chamber of commerce may be good sources.

A factual description of your institution and its goals could be written using only the documents gathered so far, **but it wouldn’t be a case for support.** An effective case must reflect the goals and aspirations of those who will carry the campaign to success. That’s why the next steps are so critical.

4. Interview those with the capacity and/or influence to carry the campaign to success, including the institutional family and representatives of the external donor community. These interviews have practical goals: to obtain testimonials and anecdotes that

will make the case for support more credible and compelling. They also have strategic value in strengthening relationships with potential donors.

5. Write a draft of the case for support to be shared with leaders from your donor constituency, based on what you’ve learned from the steps above. This is a tentative case, still untested in the donor marketplace, so it is sufficient to position it as a “working document.” Share this tentative case with representatives of your various donor constituencies particularly those who are considered prime candidates for campaign leadership and/or leadership gifts. Key leaders who are serving on the case for support advisory committee or board of trustees can be effective ambassadors at this point in the process.
6. Now you’re prepared to write a market-oriented case for support, based on the listening that you’ve done among your donor constituency. You should be able to justify every statement made in the case on the basis of that listening and thinking.
7. Begin the translation of the case for support into the various media which you will use in the campaign, including brochures, video or multi-media presentations, talking papers, and standard grant applica-

tions. The themes, graphic identity, and content of these materials will all be driven by the content of the case for support. And since the case for support has already survived a rigorous marketplace review, the marketing materials can be developed with the confidence that they will be on target.

### **Who should write the case for support?**

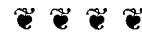
As described here, a variety of staff members, volunteers, and outsiders can and should participate in the process of developing a case for support. In addition, the entire process needs to be integrated into the overall development strategy. Eventually, though, this collective vision must give way to a single, unified voice. No committee has ever generated compelling copy!

Whoever is eventually assigned the task of writing the case for support, he or she must have the following abilities:

- ✓ to write clear, concise prose that is well organized, grammatically correct, and demonstrates flashes of creativity and insight,
- ✓ to grasp the fund-raising strategies that will be employed,
- ✓ to balance differing opinions and build consensus for the project through language,
- ✓ to step outside the organization and see it

through the eyes of those who will be asked to give and serve.

While it may be possible to find someone inside an organization who exhibits the first skills, the final requirement can be more challenging. Even the most sensible staff member can succumb to the pressures exerted by colleagues to tell their side of the story. And a loyal employee who has grown accustomed to looking at trees may find it difficult to see the entire forest. The fresh point of view brought by an objective third party as writer, editor, or advisor can help maintain the marketplace perspective.



When the goal is to heighten the involvement of key constituents through the process of developing the case for support, the process naturally takes longer. When this process is completed, however, your institution will not only have a case that is firmly grounded in the realities of the marketplace, you will have a donor constituency that is already more involved in your institution and its plans for development.

Volunteer enlistment and solicitation can follow naturally as well as the long-term success of your institution.

## *About the Firm*

Goettler Associates was founded by Ralph H. Goettler in 1965 to serve the nation's nonprofit organizations. The firm brought together a group of highly qualified professionals to serve the total funding and marketing requirements of clients' major fund-raising initiatives. Since 1965, we have helped more than 1,500 nonprofit entities raise over \$1 billion to fund capital projects, build endowment, or facilitate special projects.

### **Services**

Goettler Associates is a full-service, client-oriented firm. We tailor a program to the special circumstances of each client. This often requires a combination of several essential elements, including capital, annual, and deferred giving; and marketing and public relations. We take pride in the quality of counsel that we can provide in all of these areas.

We have helped our clients conduct successful capital campaigns, increase annual operating support, establish planned giving programs, and strengthen their endowments through our services:

#### *Studies and Assessments*

- › Campaign Planning Studies
- › Development Assessments
- › Strategic Planning

#### *Donor Cultivation and Campaign Positioning*

- › Leadership Awareness Programs
- › Case for Support Development
- › Campaign Identity and Marketing
- › Writing, Print Design, and Video Production

#### *Development Support*

- › Prospect Research
- › Endowment Management
- › Executive Search

#### *Campaign Management*

- › Resident Campaign Direction
- › Periodic Campaign Consulting
- › Consultation on Annual and Deferred Giving Programs

### **The Team**

The Goettler Associates team of fund-raising professionals draws upon a wealth of experience and is supported by extensive human and information resources. Our consultants average more than fifteen years of experience in institutional advancement.

### **Building on Trust**

**Our Mission** is to assist nonprofit organizations in achieving challenging fund-raising goals by:

- › strengthening the client's image and awareness;
- › recruiting, training, and motivating volunteers; and
- › attracting significant philanthropic support.

**We guide** our clients toward their financial goals through:

- › the integrity and high performance standards of our employees;
- › effective and honest relationships; and
- › the quality of our work in achieving success.

## *Let's Talk About Your Situation*

Fund-raising campaigns have been won without implementing all the principles and strategies discussed in this article. Often, in the course of planning and executing a particular campaign, we find that the best way to achieve success is to “invent” new tools and approaches to replace the standard ones. We at Goettler Associates strive to apply the principles of fund raising in a flexible way that is appropriate to the needs and circumstances of each individual client.

There are certain constants, however. Our experience shows that the campaign which is properly conceived, planned, and executed—with the assistance of professional counsel—is the campaign which invariably enjoys success.

We'd enjoy talking with you informally about these ideas. Or, better yet, we'd like to learn about *your* situation and discuss with you how we can apply our experience and talents to further your success. We would welcome the opportunity—without cost or obligation—to learn more about the current status of your advancement program. This includes your development objectives, the challenges you face, and the resources you have for achieving your goals.

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