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# The Case Statement

*your first step toward raising major gift dollars*

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**W**hen I first started in fundraising in 1974, I frequently heard other professionals say we needed a “case statement” to raise money. I wrote what I thought was a good case, but few people took the time to read it...and no one who *did* read or look at it gave any money!

What I’ve learned since 1974 is this: Your organization’s case *is* important, but it is *less* important than having affluent and influential volunteers on your board of directors *and* among your organization’s constituency of donors. Experience has demonstrated repeatedly, a strong case with weak leaders produces little major gift money; a weak case with strong volunteer leaders succeeds in raising the funds needed virtually every time.

## WHY IS THIS SO?

The old fundraising axiom sums it up—people give [serious] money to *people* [they know and respect], *not* to causes and projects. This simple observation is why we believe it’s the *management team*, not the cause or project, which leads to fundraising success, *especially* in the major gifts arena. So while we believe the case comes *first* (it helps in recruiting strong leaders), we know it’s *not* the most important element for achieving fundraising success—*volunteer leadership is!*

We’ve also learned raising major gift dollars,

even when affluent and influential volunteers are present with a good case, *still requires a process involving experienced professionals* who know how to “engineer” the case and the volunteer leadership and produce the major gift dollars many organizations desperately need, but go without.

## BEGIN WITH A SIMPLE PLANNING MEETING

The way to raise major gift dollars and build stronger, more committed volunteer leadership begins with a simple planning meeting. (At the risk of sounding self-serving, we recommend your hiring a professional with a good track record to help guide you through the process successfully.)

We recommend keeping your planning committee (ad hoc or not) small, between five and nine of your best staff and volunteer leadership. Plan on having a two-hour session designed to yield the highlights of a comprehensive case for your institution and a list of your best prospects to whom we can take the case for testing purposes.

## OUTLINE CURRENT AND FUTURE NEEDS

Our next step is to provide you with an outline of possible areas of need for your institution. We find the following outline works well in focusing on and identifying current and future institutional needs:

**MISSION STATEMENT**  
**~FIVE YEAR PLAN—NEEDS ASSESSMENT~**

ITEM	EXPLANATION/JUSTIFICATION	FIVE-YEAR PROJECTED \$ INVESTMENT
<b>1. Capital needs</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• acquisitions</li> <li>• renovation</li> <li>• new construction</li> <li>• equipment</li> </ul> <b>2. Endowment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• donor-designated (restricted)</li> <li>• undesignated (unrestricted)</li> </ul> <b>3. Debt retirement</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• annual operating</li> <li>• capital</li> </ul> <b>4. Special projects/programs</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• startup costs : seed money</li> </ul> <b>5. On-going projects/programs</b>		

Using this outline can help volunteers and staff focus both on the mission (which remains relatively constant) and activities (which frequently change) necessary to achieve the mission. If we know what we need or want to do, we can determine the resources we need to do the job. The investment dollars, or costs, associated with each item in your plan need *not* be exact at this early stage, but rather realistic estimates. Justifications for each item may be included as needed.

Once completed, you have a working case. This is not the final product, as it is subject to modification through the planning process. Understand, too, this is your *internal* case, *not* the external case, which, if developed, may be pages long, four-color and glossy!

The point we want to emphasize here is the importance of building a *comprehensive* case. To enjoy the credibility and success that comes from major gift fundraising, you need to have

done your homework. You must demonstrate to your leaders and those of the community you have taken time and given thought to assessing your situation and have developed a defensible plan for the future.

**SHOULD YOU ASK FOR ONE NEED OR MORE?**

In our experience, most organizations' staff and volunteers have *one* pressing need (i.e., new building or renovation of an existing facility, just more money for programs—all of which are legitimate needs). But *stating* just one need is a serious tactical mistake. It's equivalent to being a mom-and-pop store in an era of supermarkets.

Having only *one* item in your case severely limits your volunteer leaders' ability to raise money successfully. It is far better for them to have several needs to appeal to different people holding different attitudes about giving. Empowering your volunteer leaders is smart strategy—it enables them to succeed!