Building A Strong Case For Support

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, many funders have quickly adapted their funding models. This has enabled them to support charities and community groups who are facing more demands for their help, as well as supporting charities who are struggling financially as a result of COVID-19.

Regardless of which funder or donor you approach, you will still need to have a clear and compelling case for support. As a foundation for all your fundraising, your case for support is key to achieving successful applications. This guidance will take you through the essential points your case for support should cover and highlights specific things to consider when applying for COVID-19 emergency or recovery funding.

Why your charity must have a strong case for support

Even though some funders providing emergency COVID-19 funding have eased their application requirements, competition for these funds will continue to be intense. To give your application the best chance of success, it will need to be persuasive and show how a funder's financial support will make a difference.

As your case for support forms the backbone of your approaches to all major donors, funding bodies, and the local community, it is worth investing time and resources to get it right. It can be a case for support about your charity as a whole, or for a particular project or programme you are fundraising for. Draw on the voices of key people in your organisation to build your case and regularly review it to ensure it's up to date.

A case for support is usually between four and six pages long. However, for COVID-19 related funding applications you could make it shorter as new COVID-19 related funding application requirements need a lighter touch than standard application requirements. Either way you should include any key facts, financials and summary plans that you have. To bring your case to life, it helps if you include pictures, personal testimonials and quotes.

Key questions you need to ask yourself

Make sure your case for support addresses the three key considerations below:

- What is the need?

- What is the solution?

- What will the outcome be?

These three important considerations have been developed into more detailed questions to form the structure below. When answering each question, keep these three key considerations in mind.

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Structuring your case for support

The following questions will help you articulate your case for support or reflect on your current case. Some of the possible responses provided may not be applicable to your charity or project but will give ideas to work from.

Although funders' questions will vary, they are typically based on the following areas:

Why should funders and donors support your charity?

- It is always good to begin with a **succinct background of your organisation** (even if your case is for a particular project). If you are an established charity, explain to funders that you are reputable, trusted and have made a real difference in the past. If you are a newer organisation, explain how you are going to make a tangible difference where it is needed and the gap you are going to fill.

- **Talk about what makes your organisation** unique. It could be that you are the only organisation in your community that runs a certain service, or the only local hub that is still running regular support. You may be the only charity that campaigns and works for a cause in a certain area.

- **Talk about the connections and networks your charity has** that enables you to create long-standing and meaningful relationships with your community, volunteers, beneficiaries or supporters. For example you may have links with:

  – Other organisations – such as charities, community groups or social enterprises
  – Local schools, universities, hospitals, care homes, libraries
  – Businesses or corporate partners
  – A network of volunteers and supporters

- **Highlight your track record**, including any projects or activities your organisation has run that have helped people or made a lasting impact. For example, you may provide support services for local people and communities, raise awareness of key issues or be active in campaigning. Whatever the activity, funders want to see that it is needed and brings positive benefits.

What is the need for your charity's activities or project?

- **You must clearly demonstrate the need for your project or activity.** Without doing this, funders won't be able to see why you need the support and how their funds can help. Charities address a wide range of needs, including:

  – Protecting buildings, heritage or nature that are at risk of disappearing
  – Supporting the community where without the support there would be detrimental effects
  – Giving individuals opportunities that are otherwise denied, for example giving children access to education
  – Alleviating suffering or the loss of life

- Emphasise why you need support **now.** Vulnerable and disadvantaged people who were already dealing with isolation and poverty, are being hit hard by the pandemic. The work your charity does, may be more important than ever.

- Other causes that are not necessarily directly helping those hit hardest by COVID-19 such as **arts, heritage or the environment also need support now.** Although they may not be currently operating, these vital services and activities should not be lost to the pandemic. There is a lot of evidence to show how important arts and heritage are to people's health and wellbeing, and building strong communities. Your charity may need support now to ensure it survives and can help build a better society as communities come back together.

- When articulating your need, make sure to remain focused on the **opportunities and positive impacts** your charity can bring. Although this may seem like a time of worry and despair, focus on what your charity could achieve and the impact it could make if it had the support from funders. This will help funders to see that even in these difficult times, your charity can make a positive difference.

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Who benefits from your work? How do they benefit? How can you demonstrate this?

- **Flesh out the detail of the particular groups** of people that you support:

    - What is their age group or other important demographic?
    - What is their particular need?
    - Are they all in a specific area, or spread geographically?

- **Explain how these groups benefit from your work** and give examples to evidence this. For example, your beneficiaries may be educationally disadvantaged young people; they live across several cities which your charity operates in. The free tutoring and teaching your charity runs means these young people get more attention and support to reach their full potential.

- **Be specific** about how many people use your service or activity; has the number of referrals from social services grown? Can you say numbers have grown recently and is there evidence this is due to COVID-19? If so, highlight these points.

- If it is possible to get **testimonials or quotes** from people you support, include them as anonymised supporting quotes in your case.

What difference would a donation or grant make?

- A larger grant from a major funder could be the difference between your charity continuing and potentially developing a service, or having to close it down completely.

- It helps to **spell out what might happen if you don't get support from the funder**. For example: 'without support from funders and donors, we would not be able to provide a lifeline for isolated and vulnerable people; we would not be able to prevent the isolation that people in our community face, isolation that has been compounded by the impact of COVID-19.

- Don't forget to emphasise the difference that a donation will make on donation forms intended for individuals, remind them that whatever the size of donation, big or small, it will make all the difference and go directly towards supporting people.

How might a gift be acknowledged/what do donors get in return?

- **Saying thank you** is so important regardless of the size of donation. Make sure you thank people for their donation as soon as possible, be it by email, phone call, or letter. It helps to establish a positive relationship and encourages people to give again. Take any opportunity you can to thank your donors throughout the life of the project they have supported.

- When applying for grants, it is important to bear in mind how you will thank donors if you are successful and some trusts will ask in your application how you will keep them informed.

- **For larger grants** from national funders, or larger trusts and foundations:

    - You could include their logo on your project-supporting materials, on your website and annual reports.
    - An annual grant update report is a standard requirement for most major funders; they will give you the detail about when and how to report back to them at the point they award you a grant.
    - Consider inviting major donors and funders to events associated with the project they have funded. Obviously, this will not be appropriate if social distancing measures are in place, but the point is to keep your major donors informed and involved in your project wherever possible.
    - Depending on the relative size of gift and the project itself, it may be appropriate to consider a plaque or donor board.

- **For smaller funders**:

    - You could consider producing an update report to tell them what a difference their support made to your project or overall activities.
    - You could produce a project newsletter-style report (or other informal format) to distribute to individual donors.

How do donors know that you will look after their funding and achieve maximum value from their gift?

- **Be transparent** about your project or general activity costs, the amount of funds already raised and from whom (trust and foundations like to see which other funders are supporting you), what income you already receive, and what the shortfall is.

- **Explain clearly** how a larger grant or donation will be spent and be prepared to provide financial statements to back up your narrative.

- Highlight early in your case if you work with partner agencies or corporate sponsors.

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How can you demonstrate that you are working towards financial sustainability?

- Increasingly funders are interested in the **financial sustainability** of your charity or project, to ensure that you can deliver your ambitions and that their donation will have a lasting effect.

- When applying for emergency funding related to COVID-19, it is not going to be so important to demonstrate you are working towards financial sustainability. However, a good case for support would normally cover this point and you should still be able to articulate how your charity or project is sustainable.

- If your charity cannot currently demonstrate sustainability, have a plan in place for how you will become sustainable in the future that you are prepared to share. For example, if the costs of running your arts centre are going to substantially increase due to social distancing, how are you planning to cover these? Having a simple business plan you can share with funders will help to alleviate some of these questions.

- If your annual reports show anything unusual that may catch a funder's eye, address these in your case for support. Explain any inconsistencies openly, so potential funders understand the situation.

What different aspects of the project are available for funders to support, and what are their related 'ask' amounts?

- Develop a 'shopping list' to break down your project costs into easily identifiable chunks to be funded. This should detail the cost of individual items. For example, shopping list for a pet charity may look like the following:

  – cost of a pet's full medical examination
  – cost of vaccines for kittens and puppies
  – cost of food for pets housed in the shelter

- By equating their donation with a specific and tangible benefit, potential donors can feel their support will make a real and material difference.

Bringing together your case for support

Considering the questions above will help you to develop or review your case for support.

The key questions and principles in this guidance can apply to all charities – however, you will need to tailor your case of support and approach you take depending on the size, age and complexity of your organisation.

Your case of support can be used as a starting point for applications to donors and funders. Remember to adapt and tweak your case to fit with each funder's interests and requirements, as each funder has different areas of interest.

It is also important to regularly review and update your case as your fundraising progresses. This will help you to present a more successful case for support to potential funders.

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