

Your 6-Part Case Framework

By [Andrea Kihlstedt](#)

Think of it this way...

Your case for support doesn't start out as a polished document. No one's does. Your case should begin as a series of ideas organized in a logical and compelling way.

And while your organization's campaign may be very different from any other organizations, we've found that all truly compelling cases follow this simple 6-part framework.

1. Your Vision.

Write two or three sentences describing your vision.

What difference will the money you raise make in the world? (Notice, I didn't say, what difference will it make for your organization.) The vision is not about your organization's needs. Your vision is about the difference your newly capitalized organization will make in the lives of others.

***Example:** We envision a Center where photojournalists can come together to share their stories with one another and the people in our neighborhood and city. It will be a small gathering place for the courageous people who dedicate their lives to documenting the truth around the world.*

2. Your Problem.

What's keeping your organization from achieving your vision?

Describe what's holding you back. This statement of the problem sets up the solution and your campaign.

***Example:** While we have exhibit space, we have no place to bring photojournalists together in an intimate and welcoming way. We have no beds to host them when they visit from other countries for an exhibit or workshop. We have no kitchen or dining table where they might break bread with their colleagues. We have no workspace and equipment where three or four photojournalists might come for several days to work together on a project or offer a workshop to young people in the community. In short, though we have a public space to display their work, we have no space where they can come together to talk, discuss the challenges of their work and develop project together.*

3. Your Plan.

How will you overcome the problem so you can achieve your vision?

Spell out simply what you plan to do with the money you raise and why that'll solve the problem.

Example: We plan to take over the second floor of our building and create a warm and welcoming place for photojournalists from around the world. We'll be able to house as many as four people at a time. They'll be able to share meals and work in an office that is fully equipped with computers and editing software and even a darkroom. With these simple facilities, we'll be able to bring photojournalists together for residencies, workshops and discussions. The added space will also let us move our offices out of the gallery so we can be more efficient and effective.

4. Your Costs.

What's your plan going to cost?

Summarize the elements of your campaign budget and add them up. The total cost will be your campaign's working goal.

Example: We estimate that the total cost of this project will be \$412,000.

- 2nd floor Rent for 2-years: \$85,000
- Cost of renovation: \$110,000
- Computers and furnishings: \$72,000
- Costs for expanded programing: \$90,000 (\$45,000 for each of two years.)
- Fundraising and administration: \$55,000

5. Your "Why Now?"

Why is it important to solve the problem now? Every campaign needs a sense of urgency.

Example: The personal and emotional price of being a photojournalist has never been higher. Dozens of photojournalists risk their lives around the world. Several have been killed just this year covering wars and political strife and disease. But the need for this brave small group of people who capture the stories and images of what is going on around the world has never been greater. And our new center, small that it is, will be a safe haven and offer much-needed support.

6. Your Call to Action.

What can a donor do to help solve the problem and achieve the vision?

How can they give and at what levels?

Example: We invite you to help make this new haven for photojournalists a reality. Join us in honoring the work of people like Tim Heatherington and James Foley and the other photojournalist who risk their lives to show us the truth. You can make gifts of cash or pledge your gift over as many as two years. We will be pleased to review the naming opportunities for this project. All gifts of \$1,000 or more will be listed on a plaque in our main exhibit space and gives of \$2,500 or more may be designated to specific aspects of the project.

That's it. Six elements that create a simple, logical and powerful flow.

In section 1, you hook people with your vision.

In sections 2, 3 and 4 you walk them through the problem, the plan and the cost.

In sections 5 and 6, you hook them again more deeply with why it matters now and how they can help.

Don't Make The Mistakes Most People Make

Avoid falling into the following traps...

- Resist the temptation to begin case with a paragraph about their history. A common (and wrong) start is, "In 1965, the xyz organization was founded to do xyz." Blah!
- Don't focus your case on your organization's needs. No one cares about them but you! What people care about is your organization's ability to make a difference in the world...to help people live better lives! Be sure you focus on that!
- Don't pretend to be a poet. The case framework should be written in simple, clear language with active verbs and short sentences. Once you have the framework right, you can hire a great writer to capture the magic.

Engage Your Donors in the Framework Discussions

Once you've written up a draft of the 6 elements of your case framework, you're ready to ask for help.

Invite your board members and donors to a meeting to review and discuss the ideas you've spelled out. See if they flow. See if people find them reasonable and compelling. Find out how they might be made even more compelling.

Be sure to let people know that in this early framework document, you're not after word-smithing. You need their help to make sure that the ideas are:

- clear
- well-organized
- emotionally persuasive

You might put together several small groups to discuss and test the framework as the ideas become stronger and clearer.

And when you're ready — when the ideas really work — bring in a great writer to help you draft the final case for support.

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