



Cape Fear AFP

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Building a Case for Support & Crafting Compelling Communications

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Tale of Two English Majors:



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Serving nonprofits across the Southeast since 1984

Development Planning & Campaigns
Executive Search



About Us

Since 1984, CapDev has been making nonprofits better through inclusive philanthropy consulting and search services.

Our Mission

CapDev partners with nonprofit communities to enlist, empower, and embolden its leaders to embrace the transformational power of inclusive philanthropy.

Our Principles

Enlist

We identify and connect leadership.

Empower

We partner to build sustainability.

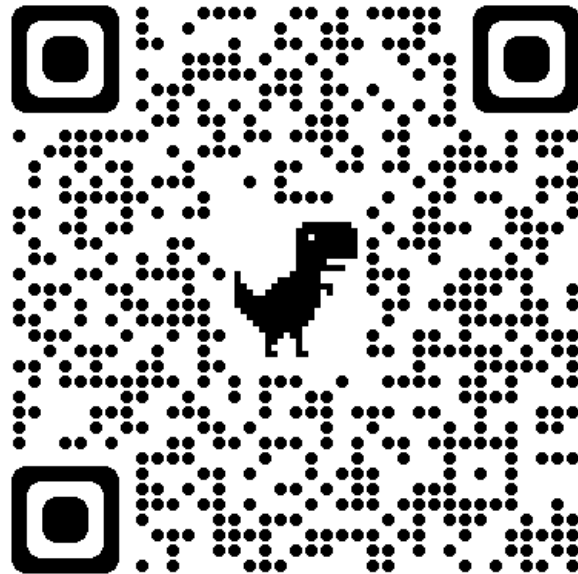
Embolden

We encourage talent and leadership.

Embrace

We transform lives through relational philanthropy.

Download today's slides:





Development Professionals as Writers

More than wordsmiths; strategists:

- Writing as strategy:
 - **Build narrative architecture** that sustains donor engagement over time
 - **Integrate data and story**, blending metrics with meaning
 - **Shape campaign messaging** and donor segmentation strategies
- Invite writers to the table
- Payoff = clear results
- **Story is at the heart of philanthropy**



Advancing Philanthropy, AFP January 2026



What inspires your work?



Communicate From the Inside Out





The Evolution of Communications in Philanthropy

30 years ago:

- Index cards instead of CRMs
- Reliance on the phone
- Secretaries
- More in-person meetings
- Fewer nonprofits
- Less competition for philanthropic support
- More volunteerism
- Printed newsletters

Now:

- High-tech & high touch
- Multi-channel communications are a must
- Personalized
- Segmented & targeted
- Virtual meetings
- Social media
- Websites
- Digital news & emails



Artful writing is the lifeblood of
philanthropic storytelling.

The bridge between
generosity and impact.



The Reward for Stronger Storytelling

Stronger Donor Engagement:
donors feel seen and inspired

Consistency and Coherence:
Unifying disparate voices
(executives, scientists, program
staff) into one clear brand
narrative

Innovative Messaging: Moving
away from stale language toward
"narrative medicine" and modern
storytelling frames

What's the difference?

- 105,000 children die of cancer in the U.S. every year.
- Our daughter will never graduate from high school, go to college, or get married. She lived her final days in the cancer unit.



Invite Donors Into the Story

- **Overcommunicating is not the cause of poor donor retention:**
 - Need to make a meaningful connection with supporters
 - Help them understand:
 - ▶ What their gift did
 - ▶ What changed
 - ▶ What still needs to change
- **How to realign messaging to strengthen relationships:**
 - Rebalance your content mix by auditing your donor communications (*next slide*)
 - Replace vague impact with specific outcomes
 - Minimize use of urgency
 - Deepen personalization beyond name fields (work your CRM!)
 - Show impact – tell them how the story ends

[NonProfitPRO, March 9, 2026](#)



Audit Your Donor Communications

- Pull your last 10 donor communications
- Review to understand:
 - How many were direct asks?
 - How many updates were there?
 - How many expressed thanks without an ask attached?
- If all/most of your messages are asks → too much pressure on donors
- Consider this messaging sequence:
 1. Impact
 2. Gratitude
 3. Vision
 4. Ask



Stories Sell; Statistics Tell

The invitation. A human-recorded intro that establishes a personal connection.

The reality. A survivor or beneficiary perspective that makes the mission tangible.

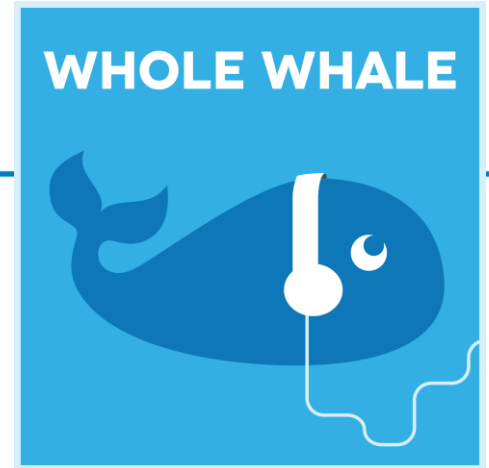
The social proof. A benefactor or volunteer sharing why the mission merits their time, talent, or treasure.

Why Donor Storytelling With Real Faces Works Better Than Stats

- Biology: brain science behind empathy
- Generic personalization feels mechanical:
 - passive personalization generated negative experiences for 53% of customers
 - made them 3.2 times more likely to regret their decision to engage
- Active personalization: replaces automation with authentic interactions (↑ 2.3 times more likely)
- Use video to win support (see flow on left)
- Ask: where is the face?



Make the Donor the Hero of the Story



StoryBrand Framework (from Dr. JJ Peterson):

1. Character – wants something
2. Hero encounters a problem
3. Meet a guide (nonprofit organization) to understand and help
4. Guide gives hero a plan
5. Hero is called to action
6. Results are foreshadowed:
 - positive = success (win)
 - negative = failure (lose)



Development Professionals:
Your job is to write as a strategist



Write for the Donor

Frame your writing with the knowledge of **WHY** the donor gives.

Five “I”s of Donor Motivation:

1. To make a relevant social **investment**, not just a gift
2. To see and know true **impact** of their gift
3. To fund **issues** that reflect their values and desires
4. To fund new **ideas** that effectively address needs
5. To respond to opportunities for **involvement**



Exercise:
Rewrite your thank you letter
without using the words “thank you”
in the first paragraph



How it's done:
Build the narrative architecture



Address the 3 Questions of ABC

Write copy that addresses these key questions:

- A. Audience:** For whom am I writing?
- B. Benefit:** Why should they care?
- C. Call-to-Action:** What do I want them to do about it?





Ways to Structure Your Message

Consider 1st:

What do you want the recipient to:

1. Feel?
2. Know/understand?
3. Do?

Address these questions:

- **What?**
 - What happened
- **So what?**
 - Why does it matter
- **Now what?**
 - What is next



Example: Levine Museum press release content

- Why it matters
- Driving the news
- What to expect
- Flashback
- Context
- Zoom out
- Zoom in
- What they're saying
- What's next

The screenshot shows the top of an Axios Charlotte news article. The navigation bar includes "AXIOS Charlotte" and links for "News", "Food and Drink", "Things to Do", "Business", and "Real Estate". The main image is a rendering of a modern, multi-story building with a textured facade and a glass-enclosed staircase, situated next to a traditional brick building with a clock tower. The rendering is credited to the Levine Museum of the New South.

Rendering: Courtesy of the Levine Museum of the New South

The Levine Museum of the New South has a new home in South End.



Use of Artificial Intelligence in Writing

Which version was written by AI & which version is human-produced:

- Expanding the Cameron Art Museum is an investment in the cultural, educational, and economic future of Wilmington. Art museums are more than buildings that house collections—they are community spaces that inspire creativity, preserve history, foster dialogue, and bring people together across generations and backgrounds.
- What attracts visitors to the Cameron Art Museum? They come from all over the region, the state, the country to see, learn, touch, grow, and enhance their lives with art that moves them and lingers in a way that transforms communities. More space would allow for greater impact.



Does AI Improve Development Staff Writing?

- What AI are you using? Gemini, Claude, ChatGPT...
- How are you using it? agendas/minutes, action item to do lists, donor letters, grant writing, news articles, brainstorming, spreadsheet analysis
- Tips?
 - prompts
 - upload docs
 - turn on Memory
- Benefits?
- Challenges?
- Examples?



Exercise:

Start a new appeal letter, making the donor the champion:

1. What problem does the org. solve?
2. How do you solve the problem?
3. What is life like when that problem is solved?



Components to Build a Case for Support

Emotionally
Stimulating

Intellectually
Stimulating

Easily
Understood

Benefit
Oriented

Mission
Based

Shows
Sustainability

Timely

Compelling

Results
Oriented



Finding Your Voice

Consider who to include:

- Input from feasibility studies
- Use your Development Committee
- Involve writers early campaign planning
- Ask for beta readers to read, review and give feedback
- Share donor feedback to refine the organization's voice

Who do you know who could be included?



Outcomes of the Case for Support

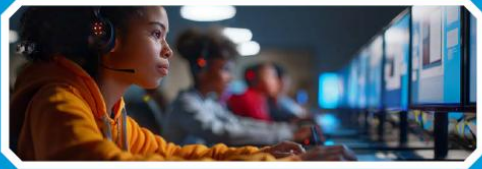


- Campaign Brochure
- Power Point Presentations
- Speeches
- Newspaper Articles
- Grant Proposals
- Leader and Donor Enlistment



Leading with Why: BGC of the Greater Triad Case

BETTER.



BIGGER.



BOLDER.

Case for Support



Why This Matters Now

Across the Greater Triad—comprising High Point, Greensboro, Winston-Salem, Asheboro, Burlington, Thomasville, and surrounding communities—over 125,000 youth under 18 are growing up in a region full of promise, yet too many face barriers that limit their potential. More than 39,000 young people live in underserved neighborhoods where poverty, education gaps, and mental health challenges threaten their ability to thrive. These challenges are real, but so is the opportunity. With the proper support, we can transform barriers into pathways and ensure that every young person has the opportunity to grow, learn, and lead.

1 in 5
children live below the poverty line.

1 in 6
youth are at risk of not graduating from high school.

16%
of teens have considered suicide; 8% have attempted.

The Need Is Urgent. The Opportunity Is Historic.

For nearly three decades, the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater High Point has stood as a cornerstone of hope and opportunity—serving thousands of young people across multiple Club sites in High Point and Asheboro with safe spaces, caring mentors, and life-changing programs. Rooted in a city known for its resilience and strong community identity, the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater High Point have built a proud legacy of impact: advancing academic success, promoting healthy lifestyles, and shaping generations of leaders. This history is not simply background—it is the solid foundation on which the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Greater Triad now rises. Guided by High Point's enduring spirit and proven record of innovation, we are poised to lead a regional transformation that unites communities, scales programs, and builds a lasting legacy of opportunity across the Triad.

Background photo is the new Congdon Hub for Great Futures, located in High Point, NC.

We invite you to join us in building the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Greater Triad.

Together, we will:

Lift thousands of youth out of cycles of poverty.

Create safer, healthier communities.

Build a pipeline of Future Ready leaders across the Triad.

Call to Action

INVEST
in the "Future Ready Triad" campaign.

SERVE
as a Board Member, Advisory Council Member, or Community Champion

SPONSOR
facilities, technology, or programs.

HOST
a Stakeholder Gathering to engage other leaders.

Together, we can build a movement that is Better, Bigger, and Bolder—anchored in High Point, extending across the Triad, and shaping the future for generations of young people.



Campaign Case Example





Start with a Simple Case for Support Structure

Use this basic template to build your case for support:

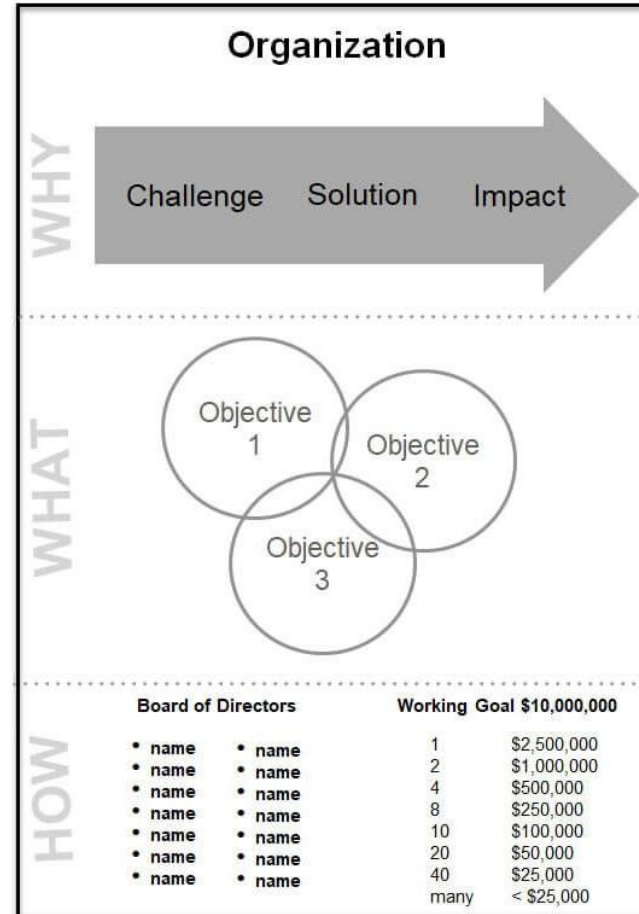
Front:

1. Why
2. What
3. How

Back:

1. Story
2. Plans
3. Info

Capital Campaign Discussion Guide, Page 1



Capital Campaign Discussion Guide, Page 2 (backside)



Workshop Workbook: p. 17



Homework Handouts: Case Crafting Exercises

Exercise: Case Crafting

Ask yourself these questions:	Draft responses as basis of understanding for the Case for Support:
Why are we communicating? A brief summary of the organization, its mission, and problem/opportunity addressed	✨ <i>Understand your <u>purpose</u></i>
Who are we talking to and what do we know about them? Demographics of the target audience, how they feel about the organization, any insights into their characteristics, what inspires them	✨ <i>Know your <u>audience</u></i>
What must we tell them? The single essential message, a campaign slogan and theme	✨ <i>Let your "why" lead your case-writing</i>
How should the audience respond? What should they think, feel, do	
Why will they believe us? Motivating points of support – data, facts, impact, perspectives, testimonials	
What is the tone of the case? Use adjectives to describe the voice of the case	
What does success look like? Include goals that can be measured	
What are the mandatories? Must be accomplished in this campaign; campaign objectives and outcomes	
What is the timeline? When will be campaign and the project be completed?	

Use responses in the above template to inform the Case for Support.

Building Your Campaign Case for Support

A well-written, persuasive Case for Support that clearly articulates a bold vision is a critical foundation for building a successful campaign.

CapDev's counsel and case writer will work with your team to prepare the first draft of your written case for support. We have provided a tool below to help (1) identify the goals of the campaign, (2) determine the funding priorities that will help reach campaign goals, and (3) to explain the importance of these goals to the philanthropic community.

The thinking behind these questions will set your campaign up for success:

1. **Campaign Goal:** *(example: Raise \$2 million to ensure that children ages 5-12 can learn about eating healthy foods and develop cooking skills in a safe after-school environment.)*
2. **Campaign Timing:** *(Why should this happen now? What happens if no action is taken?)*
3. **Funding Priorities:** *(include as many funding priorities as necessary to accomplish the goal – can be a mixture of physical space, equipment, programmatic, endowment, etc. AND a cost estimate for each)*
 - Funding Priority 1:
 - Funding Priority 2:
 - Funding Priority 3:
 - Funding Priority 4:
 - Funding Priority 5:
4. **Why:** *Why does this project matter? (draft a statement that explains the driving force behind why the goal and funding priorities will lead to better outcomes for the target population and the community, using a mixture of data and anecdotal evidence)*

Who should be quoted in the case for support? *Identify 4-5 constituent stakeholders (staff, volunteers, clients, donors) who can provide different viewpoints for the case writer to interview.*

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.



The well-crafted **story** is the exact moment when the donor's **intention** transforms into **commitment**.



Thank you

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Q&A and Discussion