

A GUIDE TO WRITING A CASE STATEMENT

Community Foundations of Canada



*Community Foundations
of Canada* *Fondations
communautaires
du Canada*

301-75 rue Albert Street
Ottawa ON
Canada K1P 5E7

T +1-613-236-2664
F +1-613-236-1621
info@community-fdn.ca
www.community-fdn.ca

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A GUIDE TO WRITING A CASE STATEMENT COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS OF CANADA

INTRODUCTION

Community Foundations of Canada and the J. W. McConnell Family Foundation share a belief that increasing public support for local initiatives aimed at protecting the environment and promoting sustainable development are important community issues and that community foundations have a particular role to play in pursuit of these objectives. Working together, these two organizations have developed a program to help community foundations strengthen their capacity to respond to local environmental issues.

In this phase eight community foundations from across the country have been selected to participate in a program of learning and collaboration. With a grant from the J. W. McConnell Family Foundation each community foundation is identifying and carrying out activities to enhance their capacity to address environmental issues through grantmaking, endowment building and community convening. By participating in meetings and information exchanges these community foundations are sharing their experiences and learning from one another. In the next phase of this initiative they will widely disseminate their best practises and relevant resources within the community foundation sector throughout Canada.

As an aid to help build a broad base of community support for related local environmental initiatives or special projects in general, this publication, *A Guide to Writing a Case Statement*, has been developed. Its purpose is to introduce the *case statement* format to community foundations. While best prepared during the initial stage of a project, a *case statement* can be developed at any point, whenever there is a need to re-focus or re-energize an initiative. Should your community foundation decide to develop a *case statement* in support of your environmental initiative, related endowment fund development or any other project, it is hoped that the information contained in this guide will prove useful, either in whole or in part, as you carry out your work.

HOW THIS GUIDE IS ORGANIZED

This guide is organized into three main sections. **Part 1: A General Overview of a Case Statement** provides background information on what is meant by the term *case statement* and describes its purpose, overall importance and intended audiences. It is best to read this part first. **Part 2: The Writing Process** recommends who should write the case statement and what background information will be useful. **Part 3: A Step-By-Step Approach** presents a standard outline used in developing a *case statement* and explains how to build a document of this nature from start to finish. This section also includes a list of **key questions** to help ensure critical elements are addressed. **Part 4: In Closing** provides some final thoughts. **Appendix A: An Example of an Environmental Case Statement Examples** introduces the reader to an example of a draft *case statement* prepared by the Niagara Community Foundation.

PART 1: A GENERAL OVERVIEW OF A CASE STATEMENT

What is a case statement?

Case statement is a term applied to a written communications format, most commonly used within a capital campaign model, but with the potential to be applied to any project. Once developed the *case statement* presents a factual, comprehensive and motivational argument of support on behalf of any given project. It lays out the mission and goals of the organization behind the initiative and connects these elements with the need or cause being promoted.

The central purpose of a *case statement* is to create organization wide focus and support for an initiative that will eventually lead to an ability to motivate prospective supporters, key stakeholders, volunteer leaders or partners to take positive action on behalf of the featured project.

What is the purpose of a case statement?

A *case statement* serves a variety of purposes and to be effective must:

- articulate the project's vision
- showcase the organization's mission and objectives
- illustrate the past, present and future impact of the organization
- bring a clear and dynamic organizational focus to the project
- present the rationale and purpose behind current programs
- profile new programs and show how they will enrich and benefit people's lives
- establish an organization wide focus and understanding of the central need
- build consensus and support for the need
- motivate staff, volunteers, key stakeholders and partners to support the project
- motivate prospective supporters to take tangible, positive action
- form the basis for the development of the related communications plan, verbal messages and written communication tools

How important is a case statement?

A *case statement* is critically important in helping to strengthen and stabilize a project, especially an initiative seeking a broad base of support. Usually prepared at the outset, it plays a key role in helping to focus an organization on specific goals and ensures that staff, volunteers, key stakeholders and partners understand the nature, scope and purpose of the initiative. The *case statement* also helps ensure consistency in all related written and verbal communication. All this helps build a solid base of understanding throughout the organization and, hopefully, eventual internal project support. While it may appear that the development of a *case statement* is time consuming and labour intensive, in the long run it saves time and helps ensure the efforts of an organization stay focused through the various stages of a project's evolution.

What is a case statement used for?

A *case statement* is primarily an internal document with four main uses. It will help an organization:

1. obtain internal project consensus
2. test the validity or merit of a project
3. recruit volunteer leadership and partners
4. develop a foundation of information that will form the basis for project related messaging and written communications materials

Objective #1: Obtain Internal Project Consensus

A *case statement* serves as an interactive tool to help obtain feedback in an organized way from staff, volunteers, major stakeholders and partners. It is important to view the *case statement* as a *dynamic* document meaning that it will undoubtedly go through a number of draft stages as its reference group members react to its content and it evolves to accurately reflect the accepted priorities, aims and goals of the project. This collective process of review helps build understanding, consensus and eventual support for the initiative.

Objective #2: Test Project Validity

The *case statement* is an effective tool for testing the validity or merit of the expressed need and the proposed organizational response to this issue. It provides information in an organized way, helping to ensure that a meaningful discussion can take place about the nature of the project, its goals and objectives and whether or not widespread acceptance and support exists.

Objective #3: Recruit Volunteer Leadership and Partners

Volunteer leaders and partners are key to the success of any project and it is important to attract these key individuals or organizations within an appropriate time frame. A *case statement* can help with the recruitment process. It helps build project credibility and confidence in the potential for a successful outcome and motivates individuals and organizations to get involved.

Objective #4: Develop Communications Materials

Once organization wide acceptance of a project's vision and scope has been confirmed, as reflected in the *case statement*, this document forms the basis for the development of all related written communications materials and verbal messaging. Using the *case statement* as the foundation for the development of these materials helps ensure that information is factually accurate, the tone of the message is consistent and the project's central theme is reinforced whenever possible. Specific communications materials may include but are not limited to:

- Case Statement Summary
- General Brochures
- Newsletters
- Web-site
- Major Gifts Brochure
- News Releases
- Speaking Notes
- Related Correspondence

Who should read the *case statement*?

While the *case statement* is an invaluable tool it is not necessarily intended for widespread distribution. It is best used to build internal organization wide understanding, focus and consensus and help recruit leadership support and partners. As such, a select number of staff, volunteers, potential project supporters and partners should be asked to read the document and provide their feedback on its content and strength of its central argument.

PART 2: THE WRITING PROCESS

Assigning a Writer

Writing a *case statement* can be challenging. Whoever is assigned to this will need to begin by collecting a broad range of information and then develop a document that clearly yet succinctly articulates the nature and scope of the project. It is best to assign this responsibility to one person, someone who will collect the relevant background information and then create a draft document to which others can provide their feedback.

Whether the community foundation decides to use the services of an in house, professional or volunteer writer, when considering whom to select for this job it is important to discuss with the individual whether or not they feel comfortable working on an assignment of this nature. Given the need to seek feedback and to then make revisions based on this information, it is important that the writer understands that they must give up ownership of the document. Along with their skill as a writer they must be willing to seek and receive feedback, be able to apply judgement in assessing the validity of the feedback received and incorporate appropriate revisions into the various draft versions.

Preparing to Write the Case Statement

In preparing to writing a *case statement* the writer should develop a good level of knowledge of the organization's programs, services, structure and operational plans. They should also clearly understand the nature and the scope of the featured project. This background information can be acquired by reviewing existing written information about the organization's programs and services, including annual reports and strategic planning documents. Key staff persons and volunteers should be interviewed to add to the factual collection of information and to gain insight into the organization's cultural norm, nature of the project and the current level of commitment. Throughout this preparation stage ideas for the project's central theme will start to form.

Developing the Central Theme

Not every *case statement* will have a clearly expressed central theme but, if possible, this is a good idea. It helps illuminate a project's vision and establishes an emotional connection for staff, volunteers, stakeholders, partners and, eventually, the broader community.

A writer will begin to develop ideas for how to express the central theme as they conduct their research into the organization and project. They can test these ideas early on in the process by presenting them in the *case statement* outline. Or, they may decide to work with a small group of individuals and conduct a brainstorming session to develop some ideas for expressing the central theme.

Central Theme Examples

Ours Forever – The Sea to Sea Greenbelt ... *The Sea to Sea Greenbelt* is an example of a specific campaign theme within a regional program called *Ours Forever*. The local initiative is aimed at protecting and preserving a 50 kilometre corridor of forest, hills, valleys, streams and marine areas by increasing public awareness about their importance and potential recreational value as part of the regional park and trail system. The project is raising the funds necessary to acquire these lands so they can be placed in a public trust for the benefit and enjoyment of people today and for generations to come

Toward A Better Age ... This theme was applied to a successful province wide public consultation process directed at issues of importance to seniors. It was used to create interest, focus discussion and generate ideas on new programs and services that would enhance the quality of life for seniors.

Honouring the Past – Building for the Future ... This theme statement was attached to a grassroots initiative aimed at revitalizing an aging community hall with historic memorial significance. It helped to communicate to the community that the building, the land on which it was situated and the rich and significant history associated with the site was valued but that it was time to renew the facility. By focusing on this central message the community began to see that the community legacy would continue, evolving into a new centre that would benefit current members of the community and generations to come.

The Feedback Stage

Once the *case statement* is at the point that the writer is confident that it will provide an adequate basis on which to generate meaningful discussion it is time to initiate the feedback stage. A reference group, either formal or informal, can be created for this purpose. The job of its members is to review the *case statement* drafts and provide feedback. The writer will take this information and make the required changes.

A questionnaire can be useful in obtaining constructive feedback. It can ask for information on the effectiveness of the *case statement* and explore whether or not the draft document presents:

- a clearly stated vision and related theme
- a brief history of the organization and its impact
- the organization's current and future goals and objectives
- a strong argument that supports the project's feasibility and validity
- the rational and emotional reasons for supporting the project
- the impact of a gift or support

It is also important to determine if the case statement is:

- written in a style that is easy to read and understand
- factually correct
- built around an easy to follow central argument
- motivational, with the potential to generate positive action
- complimentary to the image of the organization

In developing a *case statement* it can be challenging to find and maintain the right balance between the factual presentation of information and inspirational message intended to inspire or motivate the reader.

Check to ensure the document:

- introduces the need at an early stage
- builds a sufficient case as to why the project is important and worth supporting
- clearly states the nature of support required

PART 3: A STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH

Case Statement: Standard Outline

Given the wide variety of organizations, projects and needs there isn't one absolute format that must be used when developing a *case statement*. However, there is a standard outline for a *case statement* that is often used. It combines a presentation of factual background information along with a clearly stated expression of need.

The following outline lays out the ten sections that are generally considered to be part of a standard outline for use in developing a *case statement*.

CASE STATEMENT: STANDARD OUTLINE

Section 1: Introduction

Section 2: Background on the Organization

Section 3: Statement of Need

Section 4: Related Objectives

Section 5: Summary of Longer Range Goals

Section 6: Financial Information

Section 7: Leadership and Partnership Profile

Section 8: Support Options

Section 9: Recognition Opportunities

Section 10: Conclusion and Wrap-up

A step-by-step approach to developing a *case statement* that adheres to this format follows. Please keep in mind that it can be used as it appears here or modified to suit a particular situation. A **Key Questions** feature is included in each section to draw attention to important considerations.

APPLYING A STANDARD OUTLINE

Section 1: Introduction

This section sets the stage for the entire document. It briefly states the central issue and the proposed organizational response. It is not uncommon to build the introduction around a central theme or vision. It may take the form of a message from a key leader. Whatever approach is used it should catch the interest of the reader and motivate them to want to read the document in its entirety.

Key Questions:

- Why is this project important to the community?
- What role is the organization playing in this initiative?

Section 2: Background on the Organization

This section establishes a contextual framework for the presentation of the central argument of support by providing an overview of the history of the organization and describing its main attributes and unique qualities. This presentation of information on the role of the organization will help to enhance its credibility.

Key Questions:

- What makes the organization special?
- What experience and benefits best describe the organization?
- If this is a unique or new approach for the organization, why is it important to get involved in a project of this nature and at this time?

Section 3: Statement of Need

This section forms the heart of the *case statement*. It clearly states the need being addressed and the central argument that justifies its importance. If there is a financial component to the project this is the section that introduces this information. This section must clearly articulate the direct benefits that will result if the project is successful.

Key Questions:

- Why is this project so important?
- What difference will a successful project outcome make to the community?
- How will this project impact people?
- Are there other partners involved in the project ?
- How will this project change lives?
- What will the impact be on the community and on those who live there if the project doesn't go ahead?
- What is the current stage of the project?

Section 4: Related Objectives

This section focuses again on the organization with specific reference to the short-term objectives or response(s) developed by the organization in reaction to the statement of need outlined in Section 3.

Key Questions:

- What immediate action(s) is the organization prepared to take in response to the need expressed in Section 3?
- What impact will this have in addressing the need expressed in Section 3?
- Why are partners and collaborators required and what role(s) will they play?
- How will the organization work with partners?
- How can volunteers and individuals participate?

Section 5: Summary of Longer Range Goals

This section continues to build a contextual framework but unlike Sections 2 and 4 it focuses on the future goals of the organization and reinforces its longer-term direction. This information will underscore the organization's capacity and ability to address and sustain an effective response to the need.

Key Questions:

- How does the expression of need fit within the longer-term goals of the organization?
- How does this project build community capacity?
- What makes the organization special and best equipped to address the need?

Section 6: Financial Information

This section presents a snapshot of relevant financial information. Reference should be made to the specific financial needs and goals associated with the project. The presentation of this information should be straightforward and easy to understand. If other funding is currently in place or committed this information should be referenced here. This section lends itself to the use of visual aids such as simple charts or graphs.

Key Questions:

- What information is required to provide an overview of the financial needs associated with the project?
- How can this information be presented in an interesting and easy to understand format?

Section 7: Leadership and Partnership Profile

This section profiles the key volunteer leaders and partners involved with the project, their respective roles and why they are involved. Personal endorsements can be used here to emphasize the nature of a person's involvement or level of commitment.

Key Questions:

- Which volunteers or partners would best serve to speak on behalf of the project?
- Are leaders on environmental issues currently involved with the organization?
- If the answer to the previous question is "no," how can you we engage these individuals?
- How will this project build on or enhance work already underway in the community on issues of environmental importance?

Section 8: Support Options

This section describes the ways a prospective supporter or partner can contribute along with the various levels or categories of commitment. In clearly outlining the types of gifts or ways to support the project the potential supporter can be directed to areas that will best suit their individual needs. It is important that this section includes a clear message asking for help or support.

Key Questions:

- Is there a way to present the various levels of giving or kinds of support required that will increase the desirability of getting involved in the project?
- Is the “ask” or request for support clearly stated?

Section 9: Recognition Opportunities

This section may or may not be included in the *case statement*. Sometimes it is created as a separate, companion document. Either way, it outlines the various levels of giving associated with the project and details how an organization will acknowledge and publicly recognize the gifts or the kinds of involvement received. Recognition of the role of individuals or organizations toward the success of a project is important because this provides opportunities to clearly demonstrate commitment, which will hopefully motivate others to get involved.

Key Question:

- Have ways in which supporters can be appropriately recognized been identified?

Section 10: Conclusion & Wrap-up

This section provides an opportunity to re-focus or re-state the project’s goals and vision. It should be brief, reframe the statement of need and highlight the key points. The wrap-up should draw the reader back into the discussion by reinforcing how important their role will be in achieving the project’s success.

Key Questions:

- Does the conclusion re-emphasize the vision and central theme?
- Does the *case statement’s* conclusion re-focus on the need?
- Is the conclusion directed at the potential donor or supporter?
- Does the conclusion communicate a sense of project importance and urgency?

Additional Questions

The following questions touch on important areas that should also be addressed as the *case statement* is developed. It is important to know the answers to the following questions:

- How does this project relate to other community foundation initiatives?
- How does this environmental initiative relate to the three key roles of community foundations?
- Why is it important to the community to address this particular environmental issue?
- How will success be defined/measured and over what time period?
- How will this initiative build on the work of environmental groups in the community?
- How does a healthy environment contribute to the community's quality of life?
- How will the environmental initiative be balanced with other pressing and long-term priorities?

PART 4: IN CLOSING

Final Thoughts

This booklet is intended to serve as a guide to help in the preparation of a *case statement*. It is hoped that regardless of the current status of any given initiative, organizations wanting to develop such a document can use all or some of this information to help them advance their particular project. To gain further insight into the *case statement* format seek out and review examples that other organizations in your community or network of organizations have developed or refer to Appendix A immediately following.

This guide has been developed by:

The logo for Trilogy group features the word "Trilogy" in a blue, cursive script font. To the right of the word, the word "group" is written in a smaller, blue, sans-serif font, oriented vertically.

t 1.250.656.5025 / f 1.250.656.3561 / farmerlm@shaw.ca

APPENDIX A: SAMPLE ENVIRONMENTAL CASE STATEMENT

Introductory Comments: At the time this guide was prepared the Niagara Community Foundation was in the final stages of developing the following case statement in support of the development of their environmental legacy fund. This case statement will be used as part of the follow-up material sent to potential donors, including individuals and corporations. In preparing their case statement the Niagara Community Foundation worked with an external writer. This individual was provided with background information on the components of a case statement along with details on what was unique about the fund being created and how the community foundation operates.

The first draft was tested with a small reference group with related work experience and changes were made based on their feedback. For your reference the draft Environmental Endowment Fundraising Initiative Case Statement developed by the Niagara Community Foundation follows.

Environmental Endowment Fundraising Initiative Case Statement

*We do not inherit the Earth from our Ancestors, we borrow it from our Children.
Native Belief*

This ages-old belief confirms the fact that we have a significant responsibility to preserve, conserve and enhance the natural resources of our Earth.

In Niagara, we live in a peninsula rich with water resources. Not only are we surrounded on three sides by two Great Lakes and the Niagara River; there are 78 watersheds and over 100 creeks and streams within the three major watersheds of our 12 municipalities.

The challenge to protect our environment is pressing. Headlines about compromised water quality, endangered species and shoreline erosion hit closer and closer to home. Only a few short years ago, Ontario learned the tragic price of tainted water as Walkerton experienced a dark chapter in its history.

A Precious Resource

Water is a precious resource. We depend on it for drinking, bathing, sustaining wildlife, irrigating agriculture and for recreational purposes. Beyond necessity, our waterways provide opportunities for group recreation or tranquil moments of solitude.

It is our privilege as Niagarans to enjoy these pleasures, but it is our duty as responsible citizens to do what we can to protect this resource now and for generations to come.

Much has already been done to recognize the importance of preserving Niagara's ecosystems, as witnessed by the work of the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority (NPCA), through local and regional government programs, through the Niagara Escarpment's designation as a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve, and through the countless projects and field work of many community-based volunteer organizations.

Throughout Niagara, action plans specifically targeting our water resources are being developed and implemented, such as the Twelve Mile Creek Watershed Strategy, the ambitious Niagara River Remedial Action Plan (RAP), and the Niagara Water Quality Protection Strategy. The RAP is based on the recognition that an ecosystem is an interacting network in which water, land and all forms of life are linked.

The Niagara Water Quality Protection Strategy was formed by Regional Niagara in partnership with the NPCA and the Ministry of the Environment to create a guide on how to best manage human activities to minimize the impact on our surface and ground water. The Strategy's success relies heavily on public input at every stage, from identifying existing and future problems in the watershed, to prioritizing actions, and to monitoring the outcome.

Actions on one part of the environment have an impact on the rest of the ecosystem. Similarly, none of these water conservation, protection and enhancement programs exists on its own. Rather, they are plans that are dependent on partnerships for a successful outcome.

Protecting Our Investment

Many volunteer groups and agencies across Niagara have already taken on their environmental duty, forming partnerships reaping visible, sustainable results. The Niagara Restoration Council's Niagara River Area of Concern Fish Barriers Project has already cleared more than 200 kilometres of tributaries. A healthy, sustainable fish population is returning to many of Niagara's waterways as project workers clear human-made and natural barriers such as weirs, dams, crossings and significant log jams. The four-year project could not come to fruition without the financial support from two primary sources, the Ontario Trillium Foundation and the Great Lakes Sustainability Fund, along with in-kind services from the NPCA, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, the Ministry of Natural Resources and the community of Niagara.

Similarly, the NPCA was recently granted funds from the Great Lakes Renewal Fund to reconstruct the Port Davidson and Canborough weirs on the upper portions of the Welland River. Again, the goal is to aid fish migration and movement throughout this extensive watershed with the realization that restoring one system will have a positive impact on the entire ecosystem.

These projects demonstrate that investing in the environment now benefits Niagara long into the future.

The Niagara Community Foundation Environmental Legacy Fund

Beyond plans on paper and volunteers in action, projects to restore and protect the environment need funds to realize their full potential.

The Niagara Community Foundation currently supports registered charities providing services in Niagara. It is a locally-run public foundation that builds and manages endowment funds, which are held in perpetuity, to support local charities and community priorities. Since November 2000, the Niagara Community Foundation has been collecting funds and resources given by caring citizens who have chosen to make their community a better place to live and work, now and in the future.

Each year, the generosity of individuals, groups and businesses helps the Foundation invest in several projects across the peninsula. Recently, the Great Lakes Protection

Fund, through the Great Lakes Community Foundation Environmental Collaborative, provided financial assistance for the creation of an environmental grants program and the incentive to launch the Environmental Legacy Fund.

The grants program supports environmental groups undertaking projects that

- protect and/or restore environmental integrity of the shorelines
- protect and/or improve the water of Lake Erie, Lake Ontario and related tributaries

While addressing an identifiable environmental need, these projects will foster cooperation since community members to be served will be involved in the design and implementation of the program.

In 2003, the Niagara Community Foundation awarded grants to groups undertaking environmental conservation efforts.

- The Niagara Peninsula Conservation Foundation was awarded a grant of \$6,500 for *Sand Dune Restoration at Morgan's Point Conservation Area*. Morgan's Point consists of 28 acres of environmentally significant land located on the shores of Lake Erie. The Authority has prepared a long-term strategy to guide the restoration and conservation of this regionally significant area as it has been severely impacted by human use and a degrading ecosystem is currently prevalent on site.
- The Niagara Peninsula Conservation Foundation in partnership with the Niagara Restoration Council was awarded a grant of \$6,000 for *Building Stream Buffers for Niagara's Rivers*. Through using volunteer labour of local schools, nature clubs, concerned citizens and volunteer groups, the NRC proposes to plant 6,000 native shrubs and wildflowers in agreed upon five to ten metre no-mow buffer zones. It is planned that the five demonstration plots will take place in public parks and golf courses that have streams running through them but lack buffer zones.

To further the work begun and yet to come, the Niagara Community Foundation has developed a new level of collaboration through the creation of an Environmental Legacy Fund. Through a funding opportunity with The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, the Niagara Community Foundation has the means to multiply the strength of this fund, and the grants that are made as a result. Donations raised for the Environmental Legacy Fund will enable the foundation to receive additional support from The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation.

Give Today, Help Forever

With your help, so much more can be done to improve water quality, restore shoreline integrity, encourage land stewardship, and ultimately improve Niagara's entire ecosystem. Your gift today to the Environmental Legacy Fund will be held forever while the earnings on the fund support projects that protect and restore our environment.

Financial support can be made many ways, including

- cash gifts
- gifts funded by securities
- gifts funded by life insurance
- bequests

We have waited and watched long enough. We can't borrow from the future any longer without making a significant return on the investment and earning the trust of generations to come.

One simple gift from one individual, group or business multiplies the minute it is made to the Niagara Community Foundation Environmental Legacy Fund. The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation has created a wonderful opportunity for one simple gift to grow into a fund of resources capable of assisting programs and people improving the quality of life throughout our region. We encourage you to make a gift to support our environmental legacy.

If not now, when?

For more information on the Environmental Legacy Fund of the Niagara Community Foundation, visit the website at www.niagaracommunityfoundation.org or call Liz Palmieri, Executive Director at 905-684-8688. E-mail to ncf@becon.org