


Inclusion: Making the Case in Arts & Culture

*Business Case
Template*





So, you have a great idea for advancing your organization's inclusion goals and you know how to make it happen. Now you just need to win the support of key decision-makers and allies to support your idea and dedicate the necessary resources. To do that, you need to persuade them using a format familiar to those in management and in other important positions. This format is called a business case.

What is a business case?

A business case is a proposal given to decision maker(s) such as management or your board or key allies, to seek their support or approval for an initiative. It outlines the main points of concern to them, why your idea is valuable, and what will be involved in making it happen. It helps them make a decision.

A Simplified Framework

The details below include the main components of any business case and are a good place to start in terms of understanding what to include and why.

Below is a basic overview, with each section explained in more detail. Your written case should be short and concise – no more than 3 pages.

Key Components of a Business Case:

- 1. Introduction and Summary**
Offers a brief overview of the main points of your initiative and its goals.
- 2. Reasons and Background**
Describes a current gap or challenge and why your proposal addresses it.
- 3. Description of Recommended Initiative**
Outline key components of the initiative, including a high level overview of main activities, resources required (finances, time, staff, space, tools, expertise), and a timeline.
- 4. Impact Analysis**
Describes potential impacts as well as an assessment of the organization's ability and readiness to implement the initiative.
- 5. Risk Analysis**
Provides a summary of key potential risks and how they will be addressed.
- 6. Measurement**
Outline the short-term and long-term benefits of this initiative and how the impact will be captured.
- 7. Conclusion**
Summarizes the initiative and the key points supporting your proposal.

1. Introduction and Summary

In this section, explain the goal of your diversity initiative and the opportunity it creates for the organization. Describe how the initiative will bring about change, what this process will look like, and how it will be of value to the organization. Keep this section short.

It is helpful to tie the aims of your initiative to the concerns of the decision-maker you want to persuade. Point out how the initiative you are proposing will help them to better meet their goals and the goals of the organization; don't assume that they will make the connection. For example, the executive director of your organization is concerned about the company's budget and strategic plan. Your board might be concerned about recruitment, succession or fundraising. Other staff or colleagues might be interested in how your proposal addresses team dynamics or working conditions. Think about funders too – and their concern with their program and policy objectives. Make the connection between their goals and your proposal.

Key Questions to Address:

- What are you proposing and why?
- What will be the key outcomes? How do these align with the organization's goals and the concerns of others?

Tips:

- Catch the attention of your reader early on so that they will be drawn into reading the rest of your proposal. Speak to what's in it for them (e.g., key deliverables for them and/or the organization).
- Keep this high-level. Details will be included in other sections.

Example of a Challenge and a Solution:

Your board is small and hasn't changed significantly for a while, but several members are retiring shortly and you want to attract the next generation of members to replace them. You can see that the current board doesn't actually reflect the audience at performances and events. You are interested in grooming new members for the board by reaching out to current audience members through a program ad and a sign-up page on the website soliciting new board volunteers.

2. Reasons/Background

This section provides the reasons for your proposal. Explain the context of the challenge that you want to address with details such as the current and future state of your organization and your industry, as well as that of your stakeholders, audiences/readers, your board, and your team. Support what you say with clear evidence, including numbers where you can.

Key Questions to Address:

- What is the challenge or gap you are trying to address?
- What change is needed?
- Why is it important that it happen now?
- What may happen if your organization does not make this change?

Tips:

Reference the additional support material here, but keep it very concise and clear.

Example of a Few Background Details:

Based on your audience statistics, you can reference the demographic make-up of your audience and show that reaching out to these people would bring in new volunteers for the board who are committed to the company's programming.

3. Description of Recommended Initiative

In this section, outline your plan for implementing your proposal and how it will address the challenge. You can provide a high-level overview of the main parts of your plan (e.g., activities, resources needed, who will be involved) as well as a timeline including the achievement of key outcomes.

Key Questions to Address:

- What will be the scope of this project (e.g., deliverables and boundaries)? Which gaps can realistically be addressed and what can be achieved in the short-term and long-term?
- Why is this solution best for your organization?
- What are the stages of the initiative?
- How does it contribute to the organization's strategic objectives?
- What will be the benefits, both short-term and long-term?

Example of Some Description Details:

This is a project with both short-term and long-term potential for the company. Volunteers solicited from people who attend our events are already committed to our program and invested in the organization's artistic aesthetic. If they become board members, it will help to address our succession concerns for the board as well as strengthen our relationships with our community. In the long run, they might give us new fundraising opportunities. All this will contribute to a more diverse board, better networks for fundraising and community engagement, and greater confidence about the company's long term stability.

4. Impact Analysis

This section assesses how the initiative will affect your organization. Key topics to consider include:

- **Resource impact:** details of the financial cost, the people needed, the timeframe, as well as any cost-savings as a result of the change
- **Cultural impact:** changes to, or support for, the values of the organization
- **Readiness:** an evaluation of the organization's ability to implement the initiative (e.g., time, resources, the organization's openness to navigating cultural differences)

Key Questions to Address:

- Do the pros outweigh the cons?
- What impact will this have on current resources?
- Will the initiative affect the values of the organization? If so, how?
- What experience does the organization have with similar initiatives?
- Is there anything that can be learned from past initiatives that would help with this one?

Example of a Few Impact Specifics:

The board's nominating committee and the executive are all ready to try out new approaches and strengthen the board with newer voices. They understand the value of bringing on people who are committed to the organization's programming, and also feel that they have a good board orientation process in place which will strengthen that commitment even more.

5. Potential Risks

In this section, outline the potential risks that could result from implementing this initiative. Include the likelihood of the risk occurring and the degree to which it may affect the goals of the initiative as well as your plans for managing the risks you have identified.

Key Questions to Address:

- What risks are involved?
- What would the consequences be if they happened?
- Do you have a plan to address these potential risks? If so, what is it?

Example of a Risk:

The board is concerned that they still need to have members with specific skills and experiences for board responsibilities. They have discussed this with other arts and culture organizations that have used similar strategies and who have shared recruitment grids that helped them to assess the best candidates for new positions. The local volunteer centre will also review the vetting questions to make sure that they are written in plain language and will be understood by everyone in the audience.

6. Measurement and ROI (Return on Investment)

Explaining how you plan to define and measure the success of your initiative is critical. This will provide clear, concrete goals and explain deliverables in specific terms. Quantitative measures and qualitative ones are helpful. It's also worth noting that the data you collect can be used in multiple ways such as reports to the board, annual reports, grant reports to funders, public documents, etc.

Key Questions to Address:

- What will be the key outcomes?
- What are the key criteria for success? How will you know that the initiative is having the intended impact?
- What will be the concrete (tangible) measures for indicating that the initiative has been successful?
- Will success criteria and measures look different over time?

Tips:

- Think carefully about the data that provides the best insight into the success of your initiative and how it would be collected. Consider where and to whom this is being reported.
- While quantitative data is helpful, qualitative data is also useful and can be gathered through such things as individual interviews or focus groups.
- A return on the resources invested in the initiative is also an important measure – this return may be financial (e.g. new fundraising or expanded markets for your work), it may be social (a better community networks) or internal (better staff relationships or more skills).

Example of Approaches for Measuring Success:

You have decided to determine success by tracking turnover in the board and by collecting the CVs of all recruits and candidates. These will be reported through the nominating committee and at the annual general meeting. It was also be reported in granting reports to funders.

7. Conclusion

This section provides the opportunity to restate the key points of your proposal – essentially, a high-level connecting of the dots. State the opportunity for the organization in supporting your proposal and how this contributes to the organization’s goals and strategic plan. Be concise and keep this section very short.

Key Question to Address:

- What is the key take away from this proposal?

Example of Points to Include:

You see an opportunity for your organization to more fully draw on the interest and expertise of diverse audience members for volunteer and board responsibilities. This will encourage better engagement in the community, open up opportunities for fundraising, and improve board succession planning.

8. General Tips

Here are a few useful tips to keep in mind when preparing your business case:

Keep it short! No more than 3 pages. People are more likely to read your proposal if it's concise. Capture the interest of the reader in the introduction. Speak to their concerns and in their language.

Talk to people both inside and outside of your organization and ask for their ideas and input (e.g., colleagues, managers, artists, unions, other volunteers, policy, and finance people, as well as suppliers, clients, audiences members, other donors, funders). Aside from being useful for creating your proposal, you're also more likely to get buy-in from others if you do this. People engage more with plans or processes that they help to create.

Cultivate allies, especially other team members as well as those in more senior positions. Winning their support early on will not only make your efforts to propose an initiative more successful, but will also help when implementing your initiative as well.

Align with concerns of decision makers. You will dramatically increase your chances of winning support for your idea if you can explain how your initiative will address the concerns of the people assessing your proposal.

Think about partners and learning from others in the community. For example, if another organization has a diversity initiative that you think could work at your organization, contact them. Ask about their initiative and best practices as well as how they have measured their initiative's impact, how they got buy-in from staff at the beginning, and about the communications strategy they used for launching the initiative.

It can be helpful to propose ideas just before your organization starts to develop its new strategic plan. It can be easier to consider and include new initiatives as part of a new plan than to incorporate them into an existing one. Be mindful of the timelines for the strategic planning at your organization.

A Final Word

By structuring a proposal in a business case format, you not only include the key pieces of information decision makers need, you're also using a format they're likely familiar with and consequently will be more receptive to.

Structuring a business case is also helpful for thinking through your idea and developing a plan. If you do win support for your proposal, you will be in a better position to implement it and to insure its success.



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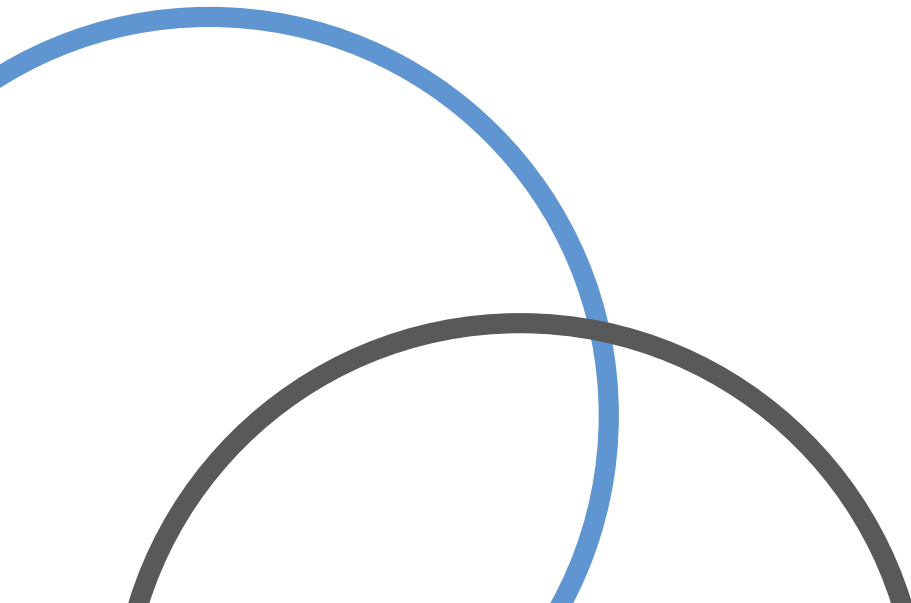
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Additional Resources

The TRIEC Campus has a variety of resources to help you to lead the conversation around change within your organization, including the following:

- Research Guide: Recruitment and Selection
- Research Guide: Employee Support and Development
- Research Guide: Cross Cultural Awareness and Communication
- IS Award Winner Ideas for Recruitment and Selection
- IS Award Winner Ideas for Employee Support and Development
- IS Award Winner Ideas for Cross Cultural Awareness and Communication

You can find these and other resources, such as videos, eLearning modules, and workshop materials at www.trieccampus.ca



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