

Turning Failure into Success - Rewriting a Case for Support

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Outline

What the case for support has to do

Essential properties of the Case for Support

How to give the Case for Support the required properties

How to make the Case for Support Speed-readable

How to make the Case for Support easy to read quickly

How to make the Case for Support easy to remember.

Structure makes the case for support easy to reconstruct.

How to Renew the Case for Support

Assembling the Description of the Project

Assembling the Background Section

Writing the Introduction

Further Reading

What the case for support has to do

1. Explain the research question

- ▶ Give evidence that it is important.
- ▶ Convince the reader that it is answerable

2. Describe the research project

- ▶ Show that the project answers the question
- ▶ State what resources will be used
 - ▶ Show you need what you are asking for
 - ▶ Show you have everything else
- ▶ Explain what will be done with the answer

3. Convince the reader that the research team is competent

- ▶ Describing (and citing) own contribution to development of question and research methods
- ▶ Citing own papers that use the research methods.
- ▶ MRC & BBSRC have specific sections for this

Essential properties of the Case for Support

- ▶ The Grants Committee and the referees work very fast
- ▶ In order to communicate effectively the case for support must have the following properties
 - ▶ It must be speed-readable (Committee Members).
 - ▶ It must be easy to read quickly (Referees).
 - ▶ It must be easy to remember.
 - ▶ It must be easy to reconstruct,

How to make the Case for Support Speed-readable

- ▶ Front-load each paragraph with its message (ASSERT then JUSTIFY)
 - ▶ First sentence of para ASSERTS (message sentence)
 - ▶ Remainder of para JUSTIFIES
 - ▶ This where you cite literature
 - ▶ Only cite what you need to justify the assertion
- ▶ Use simple, consistent structure
 - ▶ Question (background) has same structure as answer (description of the project)
 - ▶ Summary has same structure as case for support.
- ▶ Clear, consistent layout
 - ▶ Headings & Subheadings convey structure
 - ▶ Consistent terminology

How to make the Case for Support easy to read quickly

- ▶ Front-load the document.
 - ▶ Introduction gets the 'Foot in the Door' and makes the whole case very briefly
 - ▶ Pre-uses message sentences from later sections.
 - ▶ Uses exactly the same words and phrases
 - ▶ Sentences are in the same order
- ▶ Use simple language
 - ▶ Short sentences (short paragraphs; short words)
 - ▶ Consistent terminology and phrasing
 - ▶ No synonyms
 - ▶ No abbreviations
- ▶ Use simple, consistent structure
 - ▶ Question (background) has same structure as answer (methods/project)
 - ▶ Introduction sets out structure
 - ▶ Summary has same structure as case for support
 - ▶ And pre-uses message sentences

How to make the Case for Support easy to remember.

- ▶ Repetition
 - ▶ Important things should be said several times
 - ▶ Always use same words if possible
 - ▶ Repeat main message sentences 3 times
 - ▶ Embed tag phrases in message sentences
- ▶ Lists of no more than 4 items
 - ▶ Always use same list order when you repeat the lists
- ▶ Signposts & links
 - ▶ Link announces next list element
 - ▶ Signpost points to corresponding element in subsequent list
- ▶ Label list elements
 - ▶ Use tag phrases in labels
 - ▶ Use labels to link related elements in different parts
 - ▶ We need to know + tag phrase + signpost
 - ▶ This will tell us + tag phrase
- ▶ Create the Summary from the Case for Support
 - ▶ Re-use message sentences
 - ▶ Keep the order consistent

Structure makes the case for support easy to reconstruct.

1. Introduction 'Foot in the Door'

- ▶ Gets attention
 - ▶ Question - in the 1st sentence - and its importance
- ▶ Sets out the whole structure of the proposal in brief
 - ▶ Split question into (about 4) subquestions that "we need to know/understand/characterise.." + tag phrase
 - ▶ List sub-projects saying what "this will tell us" + tag phrase

2. Background 'We Have a Problem'

- ▶ States the question and gives evidence that it is important.
- ▶ Breaks it down into about 4 sub-questions - we need to know.

3. Description of the Project 'The Solution'

- ▶ General research approach/methods
- ▶ Sub-projects that answer the subquestions in order
 - ▶ What will be done, how, when, by whom, with what resources
 - ▶ Which resources will be provided by the grant
 - ▶ What this will tell us and how findings will be derived
- ▶ How findings will be disseminated

How to Renew the Case for Support

- ▶ Use this checklist to decide what is missing from the old case for support <http://www.researchfundingtoolkit.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/CaseForSupportChecklist.pdf>
- ▶ Mark out any sections that are fit for re-use, particularly:-
 - ▶ Descriptions of sub-projects/work-packages - check these using the sub-project checklist <http://www.researchfundingtoolkit.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/SubProjectChecklist.pdf>
 - ▶ Sub-question justifications
- ▶ Build the new case for support by copying and pasting what is good and rewriting what is bad.
 1. Start with the Description of the Project.
 2. Then write the Background
 3. Then copy key sentences from 'Background' and 'Description of the Project' to create the Introduction.

Assembling the Description of the Project

- ▶ Use copy and paste or writing to assemble about 4 sub-projects.
- ▶ As you add each one, check that the description includes
 - ▶ What will be done, how, when, by whom, with what resources
 - ▶ Which resources will be provided by the grant
 - ▶ How findings will be derived and disseminated
 - ▶ Draft the corresponding sub-heading for the background section.
 - ▶ Check the project for completeness, coherence, feasibility, cost
- ▶ Add a general methods intro and a tailpiece about dissemination
- ▶ See <http://www.researchfundingtoolkit.org/?p=340> for more detail.
- ▶ This section should be at least 50% of the case for support.

Assembling the Background Section

- ▶ Copy and paste, or write, about 4 sub-sections
 - ▶ Each one corresponds to one of the sub-projects or work-packages.
 - ▶ It should explain why we need to know what the sub-project will discover.
 - ▶ It should justify the explanation by citing literature
 - ▶ It can refer forward to the sub-project that will discover the answer
 - ▶ They should be in the same order as the sub projects that answer them
- ▶ Write an introductory sub-section that explains that the aim of the project is to answer an overall question that covers all of the sub-questions
- ▶ Explain, referring to literature, why the overall question is important.
- ▶ See <http://www.researchfundingtoolkit.org/?p=384> for more detail.
- ▶ This section should be less than 30% of the case for support.

Writing the Introduction

- ▶ Ensure that the Background and Project Description sections are in 'assert then justify' style.
- ▶ Copy message sentences verbatim into the Introduction
- ▶ It should be less than 20% of the total case for support.
- ▶ Most of it can be re-used in the summary.

Further Reading

Book: The research Funding Toolkit, by Jacqueline Aldridge and Andrew Derrington, Sage 2012

Blog: <http://www.researchfundingtoolkit.org/gfol/>

These slides are available on the resources page

<http://www.researchfundingtoolkit.org/resources/>