

# How to develop case studies

## Case studies can often be the most effective way of demonstrating the need or impact of your service or organisation.

Funders often ask organisations to provide case studies as examples, so it's important that you take the time to gather these and keep them updated regularly.

It can be a time consuming process, but a well thought through case study helps to promote your organisation and often raises the profile of your mission, values and ethos.

Case studies can be lodged to your website, or can be used in the press and media.

It is always important to remember though that the local press and media like human interest case studies, and these types of case study are more likely to be published. Local papers generally receive hundreds of potential news items each week, so you need to make sure that your case study stands out amongst the crowd.

This guide provides an introduction to developing strong people-based case studies, built on informed consent and a relevant duty of care.

### Informed consent

It is vital to follow the process of *informed consent* when you are approaching a potential case study.

This means that the individual or group fully understand the role they will play and the ways in which their story may be used. It is important to gain written consent.

Start by explaining what you're trying to achieve and how they can help by sharing their experiences with you. Reassure them that none of their contact details would be shared with a journalist or any other organisation without their express consent.

Check if they are happy to use their real name. Using a pseudonym may impact on filming or photographic opportunities, but is still a valid route if participants want to be kept anonymous.

Ask them about which types of media they would be happy to be featured in, and explore the possible impacts of this with them.

Make sure they are happy and that you really understand their story. Get their written approval on the notes you prepare and a consent form to confirm what has been agreed.

### Interview questions

It is vital that interview questions are well researched and prepared in advance.

You will need to think about:

- the key messages you are trying to communicate
- the story your target audiences will be interested in
- how you will approach any sensitive questions or issues
- the basic information that journalists might need will include
- name or pseudonym of the relevant case study
- age
- location plus former and current occupations
- children – how many and how old?

You will also need to ask:

- which sections of the media are they happy to speak to
- are they happy to be photographed, and
- when is the best time to contact them, and how much notice would they need for an interview opportunity.

Other than that, keep all questions as open as possible to encourage the case study to talk in their own way about what's happened, what they do, and why they do what they do. You will need to interview them in surroundings where they feel comfortable, as this will produce the best possible results.

Make sure you give them the opportunity to ask any questions they have, and leave them your contact details in case they want to discuss issues or concerns at a later date. Never force an individual or group to partake in a case study against their will. Their body language and tone will help inform your decision on this.

## How to get your case study published

It is always worthwhile identifying which papers and magazines you want to publish your case study in. In addition, it helps if you ring the relevant news desk beforehand to talk through the proposed case study. News desks are helpful sources of information, and are likely to tell you if your case study has a chance of being published or not. Likewise with magazine editorials.

Most papers are happy to publish case studies free of charge, particularly if it is a strong local story with local people involved.

Always ask the news desk or magazine editor for the likely publication date.

## Creating an easy to use library

You might want to use the case study for your website, or for a newsletter, or for a variety of other advertising or publicity avenues.

You will therefore need to consider the following.

### Style and format

Write up the case study information using the appropriate style for your target audience and the media involved. Some journalists (not all) will take the time to advise you on this. Remember to engage your audience.

- Include some notes on how the case study individual or group deals with being interviewed, how confident or shy they are, what issues are sensitive to them, and what further support they may need
- Keep it short, but detailed. A few paragraphs will usually suffice
- Include quotes throughout the case study to add authenticity and local flavour.

### Photography

- Get a copy of any high quality photographs the case study is willing to share with you.
- If they do not have any, check whether they are happy to be photographed.
- Save all photographs as captioned JPEG files less than 1MB in size and 600 pixels wide in order that they can be easily E-Mailed to editors or news desks, and always keep a high resolution version on file suitable for print reproduction.
- Most local papers and magazines no longer have their own photographers, but some still do and if your case study has a strong local flavour and is of interest they may be prepared to undertake the photographic work on your behalf. However, you will still need to control this process, and organise the photographic dates between the case study and the photographer.

### **Extract the maximum value**

Once you have your case study, make sure it works as hard as it possibly can to raise your organisational profile. You have taken a lot of time and resource preparing this, so do not waste the opportunity to use it.

Think about:

- using the case study in local papers, magazines, leaflet drops, fliers and newsletters
- if you have a social media presence, adapt the case study to engage the audience
- link your Facebook or Twitter feeds to your case study, with interesting and thought provoking headlines, and
- convert your case study into a video diary, and promote it through your website.

Support Cambridgeshire can assist with any aspect of thinking through and preparing the best possible case study. Contact [\*\*info@supportcambridgeshire.org.uk\*\*](mailto:info@supportcambridgeshire.org.uk) for more help and advice.