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# How to Create a Case for Support For Your Nonprofit



*By Alyssa Conrardy*

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how to present important information, who to involve in the process and more. In this post, I'll answer all those questions and more. Then, I'll walk you step-by-step through a proven process for developing a compelling case for support, and I'll dissect a few case for support examples and show you why they work. Ready? Let's dive in.

# Case for Support Basics: Questions and Answers

## **Q: What is a case for support?**

**A:** A case for support (sometimes called a case statement or donor prospectus) is simply a piece of communication collateral that helps prospective donors understand why they should give money to your organization. A case for support can focus on a specific fundraising goal – like a capital campaign to fund a new facility, for example – or it can simply encourage donors to give unrestricted funds to your organization to support all of its activities and initiatives.

## **Q: What format should my case for support be in?**

**A:** Most organizations develop their case for support as a written and well-designed document and then either print it and/or share it electronically as a PDF. Some also choose other creative formats, such as videos or interactive webpages.

## **Q: How do we use the case for support?**

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front of them while you're talking and use it to guide your discussion. Many development teams also find it useful to pull tidbits of data or language from their case statements and then weave them into fundraising materials, grant applications, conversations with prospective donors, etc.

**Q: What should we include in our case for support?**

A: While every case for support is different, most include the following sections:

- Case summary: pull prospective donors in by explaining (very concisely) what your organization does and why it matters. Then, tease your fundraising goal, and explain why donor support is necessary to continue to grow your impact.
- Model/Programs/Services: explain how your organization makes a difference and illustrate your impact to date.
- History: help your prospective donors understand where your organization has been.
- Vision/future plans/goals: help your prospective donors understand where your organization is going. If your case for support is focused on a capital campaign or a specific goal (like building a new facility or launching a new initiative) this section will outline what you're raising money for.
- Call to action: ask donors to give and show them how.

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**Q: Who should be involved in developing our case for support?**

**A:** Your development or fundraising team will likely lead the process of creating the case for support, but they shouldn't be the only ones to touch it. We always advocate for developing a taskforce of both internal and external stakeholders when developing important, strategic collateral like a case for support. When it comes to internal stakeholders, consider including members of your senior leadership team, marcomm team members, and program staff from all key programs that will be represented in the case for support in addition to your development team. Aim to include a diverse cross-section of your organization's staff, and involve people with a broad range of experience and tenure levels, race and gender identities, professional backgrounds etc. When it comes to external stakeholders, recognize that a significant portion of your case for support will focus on telling the stories of the people and communities your organization serves. You can't do that effectively or equitably without including those people in the process, asking for their feedback on how they want to be represented and making sure that your final product feels true to their lived experience. And of course, we can't forget donors and prospective donors. Since they'll be the end-users of the case for support, involving them for input is hugely important. I'll go into even more detail about who to include later in this post.

**Q: Isn't a case for support inherently needs-based?**

**A:** You probably already know that my team and I are big advocates for strength-based messaging, and encourage taking a strength-based approach

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their case statements heavily on the needs and challenges that exist among the people and communities they work within an effort to “pull on donor heartstrings,” but this really isn’t necessary, and it can do more harm than good in the long run. Instead of focusing on the deficits that exist among the people you work with and positioning the donor as the “savior” who can fix their problems, try focusing on the opportunities that exist in their lives and the role donors can play in helping them realize those opportunities for themselves. If you’re struggling to pivot to a strength-based approach in this or any other fundraising or communications collateral, [this post can help](#), and so can we.

# How to Develop a Case for Support: A Step-by-Step Process

As we’ve guided a wide range of nonprofit organizations through the development of their case statements, we’ve developed a process that just works, and I’m excited to share it with you here.

## **Step one: Decide what you’re raising money for.**

Will your case for support be focused on a capital campaign or other specific fundraising goal? Or are you simply looking to encourage donors to support all facets of your organization over the long term? Either way, your case for support will need to name a concrete goal you’re working toward, and you must decide what it is before you do anything else.

## **Step two: Decide who you are targeting.**

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While some case statements effectively speak to all these groups at once, doing so can be difficult. If you want to reach a broad range of different types of donors, you might consider developing a few different versions of your case for support, and modifying sections like the call to action in each one so that it aligns with the needs and giving capacity of a specific type of donor. No matter how you choose to approach this, it is important to figure out who will engage with your case for support before you get to work at developing it.

### **Step three: Involve the right people in developing the case for support.**

As I mentioned previously, it's critical to include a diverse range of both internal and external stakeholders in the development of your case for support. We suggest creating a small team of staff who will be intimately involved at every step of the process, as well as a larger group of both internal and external stakeholders who you'll ask for input and feedback at key checkpoints along the way. Here's who to consider including in that second, larger group:

- Internal stakeholders
  - Key senior leadership staff
  - Key board members
  - A few members of your program staff, specifically from programs that will be heavily featured in the case for support
  - Marcomm staff
  - Development staff
  - Volunteers
- External stakeholders
  - People who utilize your organization's programs and services

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- Existing corporate partners
  - Target corporate partners
  - Existing funders
  - Target funders
  - People in the communities where your programs and services are utilized

Depending on who you decide to include, you might get feedback from this larger group by pulling them all together into a focus group-like setting at several key points in the development of your case for support, or you might speak to them one-on-one or in small groups throughout the process.

#### **Step Four: Establish key messages and create an outline or wireframe**

Working with your small group of external stakeholders, decide on the most important key messages your case for support needs to communicate. Those key messages should ideally line up with other messaging that has been more broadly established for your fundraising department or organization as a whole. Then, get to work creating an outline or wireframe for your case for support. Since case statements are often visual documents, a sketched wireframe can often be a more useful way to visualize where you're going than a written outline. Once you have an outline or wireframe together that your small group of internal team members feel good about it, run it by your larger group of internal and external stakeholders for feedback. This will be your first key checkpoint with that larger group, and it presents a great opportunity to have them shape your case before you get too far in developing it.

#### **Step Five: Gather data, quotes and stories**

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audiences, and then pepper them in across every section of your case for support. This is where taking a strength-based approach will come into play, and you should absolutely run any stories you plan to tell by the people featured in them (even if those people will be kept anonymous) to ensure the stories feel true to their lived experiences.

### **Step Six: Create the case for support**

It's finally time to create your case for support. After all the work you've already done, this part will come easily. The most challenging aspect is typically keeping your case for support concise enough to hold a busy donor's attention. No matter what format you use, your case for support shouldn't take a donor more than five minutes to fully digest. Because you'll have set the process up to elicit feedback from many internal and external stakeholders, keep in mind that at this phase you'll just be creating the first draft. Don't get hung up on perfecting every little detail. Instead, make sure you're hitting on the most important points, establishing a solid flow from one piece of information to the next (all the way through to the call to action), and taking a strength-based approach to asking for support.

### **Step Seven: Revise and refine**

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Then, refine it based on their input and get a second draft in front of your larger group of internal and external stakeholders. Again, you can do this through one large focus group, several smaller ones, or individual conversations with a wide range of internal and external stakeholders.

### **Step Eight: Start using your case for support, and continue to iterate on it as needed**

Once you've compiled feedback from all your stakeholders and arrived at a version of your case for support that everyone feels good about, it's time to start using it in the real world. All your hard work will start to pay off as donors begin to better understand what your organization does and why they should support your goals. While you're likely to end up with a very solid case for support if you follow this process, no case is ever final. Consider your case for support a living, breathing document and continue to iterate on it as you get more feedback from donors and reach key milestones on the road to achieving your goals.

## **Case for Support Examples**

Now that you have a good understanding of how a case for support works and how to go about developing an effective one, you're probably ready to take a look at some examples. You're in luck, because I'm going to share two cases from Prosper's clients that you can use to inspire your own.

### **iMentor Chicago's Case for Support**

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that equip every student  
to achieve their potential.



 **iMentor**  
chicago

Support our growth →

Mentor Chicago is a local nonprofit on a mission to help students in low-income communities navigate the path to post-secondary success.

We do this by matching a volunteer mentor with your student in our CPS partner schools, so matter their GPA or test scores. Mentors work with students for at least three years to help them transition out of high school and on to college, career, or the next step in reaching their goals. Mentor-mentee pairs are supported by Mentor's full-time college counselors, who are embedded in our partner schools and implement our proven college access curriculum in weekly classes that are part of the school day.

The result? Mentor students are 80% more likely to complete college than their peers from similar high schools. And our impact doesn't stop with students. Because our mentoring relationships are forged across lines of difference, they deepen the understanding of issues like education equity and the challenges students like those we serve can face.

Since Mentor entered Chicago in 2015, we've grown to partner with four schools and serve 1,479 students. But this is only the beginning. Over the next five years, we're aiming to triple our impact and serve 4,500 students.



This is an audacious goal, and we need your support to achieve it.

Read on to learn more about what we do, why it matters, and how you can fuel our growth.



over high school with 22% of 18-24 year olds in Chicago out of school and out of work.

Mentor Chicago is addressing these challenges by working with every student at our partner schools on Chicago's South and West sides. This model makes it possible to raise the needle for everyone, not just the students who are already high performers, and it works. 88% of Mentor students graduate from college within 6 years, and we also provide support for students who decide college is not the right path for them. We recognize that many students benefit from continued support in their next steps after they graduate from high school. That's why we've reimagined our growing post-secondary program to include financial support and customized advising for students as they continue to work with their mentors after graduation.



"For the first time, I was able to my family to go to college. Having a mentor helps a lot, because you have someone by your side working with you whenever you need help."<sup>33</sup>

- Sandra, mentee

## Mentor by Mentor

Our mentors know that while talent is equally distributed, opportunity is not. We pair each of our mentees with a student at one of our partner schools. Then, we support these pairs with a full-time program manager at each school, an online mentoring platform, a proven college success curriculum and peer networks as they build long-term, mutually beneficial relationships.

Our college-educated mentors come from across the city and represent a wide range of ages, ethnicities, and backgrounds, which allows mentors and students to create connections across lines of difference.

Our mentors benefit as much as our students as they build cultural competence, leadership skills, and a better understanding of the challenges young people face in Chicago.

We're fortunate to have a waiting list of vetted mentors. As we scale over the next five years, we'll rely on corporate and community partnerships to ensure we always have a champion for every student.



<sup>44</sup> Working with Andrew has been a growing experience. I spend much of my time trying to figure out how to help him avoid the pitfalls of my teenage years and find the best ways to advocate for and expose him to enriching opportunities. As a man of color, I believe it's important for young men of color to see me doing something positive. I hope to inspire them to believe they can also be successful.<sup>45</sup>

- John, mentor



## School by School, and Community by Community

Chicago has a long history of segregation, systemic racism, and multi-generational poverty. These forces make it particularly difficult for students on the South and West sides to access equal-to-opportunities for education and build brighter futures for themselves and their families after high school. That's why Mentor focuses our school partnerships on South and West side schools where a majority of students could be the first in their families to graduate from college.

Since 2015, we've built partnerships with four CPS schools. With your help, we can double our number of school partnerships by 2024 and continue to grow participation in our post-secondary program. When mentors and students work together, it creates a ripple effect of positive change for the entire community. As our work continues to grow, that positive change will be felt throughout all of Chicago.



Current partner schools



2x more Chicago schools can participate in Mentor in just five years with your support.



The need was clear. Despite the fact that 68% of jobs now require post-secondary education or training, only 19% of CPS students are projected to earn a bachelor's degree within 10 years of starting high school. College graduation rates dip even lower for students of color who attend high school in Chicago's South and West side neighborhoods. But where Mentor saw need, we also saw great potential for our unique model. Mentor was drawn to Chicago by a highly collaborative group of complementary education organizations and support from Chicago Public Schools.

Mentor Chicago has experienced rapid growth over the last five years.

We have expanded from working with 207 students at one high school in 2016 to working with 1,479 students across four high schools in 2020. Additionally, this year, 62% of our high school seniors signed on to continue working with their mentors post-graduation.

This growth was made possible by significant investments from generous donors and funders like you.

170

of Mentor Chicago students enrolled in college on time over the last five years.

We have increased college enrollment by 20% at our partner schools since inception.

growing with nearly to serve more students in Chicago.

By 2024, we're aiming to triple the number of students we work with and double our number of school partnerships. At the same time, we are deepening the support we provide to our post-secondary students so they are better positioned for long-term success.

This growth is essential if we hope to realize our vision for a future where every young Chicagoan has the opportunity to succeed.

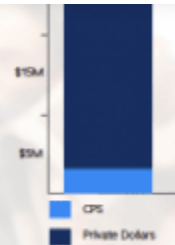
But it will only be possible with your support.





Based on those growth goals, we estimate it will cost iMentor approximately **\$25M** to operate in Chicago over the next five years. This growth will be fueled by a partnership with CPS and supporters like you, who will help us raise \$22M to support our effort to increase our impact.

But that giant leap will start with a smaller step. We are currently aiming to raise **\$8M by June 30, 2021**. That amount will allow us to achieve the next major milestone in iMentor Chicago's growth: entering a 5th and 6th school over the next two school years.



## Support our growth by making a donation today.

Visit [Imentor.org/growchicago](https://Imentor.org/growchicago) or contact Jason Friedman, Executive Director at [jfriedman@Imentor.org](mailto:jfriedman@Imentor.org) or 312.909.0686 to discuss investment opportunities.

### Pair Story: Kate and Lorneesha

iMentor paired up Kate and Lorneesha during Lorneesha's junior year at North-Grand High School. At the time, Lorneesha aspired to be the first person in her family to attend college. Kate helped her make that dream a reality. During their monthly in-person meetings--as Kate and Lorneesha worked on college applications, explored Lorneesha's school options, and discussed financial aid--their relationship continued to deepen. Kate supported Lorneesha through the passing of Lorneesha's father during her senior year, and that summer, Lorneesha attended Kate's wedding.

With help from Kate and iMentor, Lorneesha enrolled at Illinois State University in 2018. Kate and Lorneesha continue to meet monthly, and Lorneesha is on track to graduate in 2022.



Full version here

Why it works: this case for support uses a creative narrative structure to help donors understand the organization's impact and the role they can play in helping to grow it. It starts small, by illustrating how the organization impacts individual students and mentors, and then expands out to its impact on schools and entire communities. It then closes with a compelling, graphical representation of the organization's actual growth over the last several years and their projected growth that will be made possible with donor support.

donors know exactly what they need to do if they want to support the organization.

## VOA Illinois' Case For Support

# A CASE FOR TRANSFORMING ENGLEWOOD TOGETHER



**Reimagine | Rebuild | Reinvent**





For more than 125 years, VOA Illinois has worked to correct life's greatest inequities. That's why for the last eight years, we have focused and deepened our investment in the Englewood neighborhood of Chicago.

VOA Illinois serves as a catalyst for community development in Englewood, creating equitable, transformative opportunities that help move Englewood more fully into its vision for a healthy, vibrant neighborhood for all who live there.

In collaboration with residents, community organizations, local leaders, funders and donors, we are transforming the Englewood neighborhood to ensure all residents have the opportunity to rent and buy high-quality, affordable homes and enjoy important amenities and resources that support community prosperity.

Read on to learn how we can  
**Reimagine | Rebuild | Reinvent**  
 in Englewood together.

voaillinois.org 02

## Reimagine

Englewood is a historically vibrant and resilient neighborhood on the Southside of Chicago that has suffered from decades of structural racism and economic disinvestment. But this does not define Englewood.

VOA Illinois recognizes the untapped potential of the Englewood community and we know that, despite the many challenges the community continues to face, we can help create a new reality for Englewood that is full of opportunity for:

### 1. Bringing individuals, families and businesses back to Englewood

Over the last 40 years, anti-eviction and problem-solving interventions have led to thousands leaving the neighborhood. A neighborhood once housing 150,000 now has less than 90,000 residents—this is a 50% loss in population in Englewood.

We need to not only support those in the community that have stayed through the difficult times, but also bring new individuals, families and businesses back to Englewood to reignite economic prosperity and opportunity in Englewood.



voaillinois.org 03

*"VOA's mission to transform Englewood is exactly what organizations should be doing right now. VOA had this vision many years ago, but it is more important now than ever."* —Lorena, VOA Illinois Board Member

### 2. Rehabilitating abandoned commercial buildings with community amenities and resources

Abandoned buildings diminish the physical aesthetics of a neighborhood, damage the social and emotional "spirit" of a community and pose a safety risk for those who live there.

We need to repurpose these buildings to provide high-value amenities and resources that attract and keep people in the neighborhood. These resources and amenities not only support a high-quality of life in Englewood, but they also give every individual in the community a safe, multi-purpose space.

### 3. Rehabilitating abandoned residential buildings to create opportunities for homeownership

Homeownership in Englewood stands at less than 25%. In comparison, Northside homeownership rates in Chicago are over 70%.

We need to rehab abandoned and foreclosed homes to provide the neighborhood with high-quality, affordable homeownership opportunities. This not only creates opportunities for renters in Englewood to buy, but also brings more individuals and families to Englewood with opportunities for homeownership.

### 4. Repurposing vacant residential lots with high-quality, affordable rental housing

When compared to other South and Westside neighborhoods, the number of vacant lots in Englewood is disproportionately high. The current real estate vacancy rate in Englewood is nearly 50 percent, which is higher than the rate of vacancies in almost 90 percent of all U.S. neighborhoods.

We need to replace vacant residential lots with high-quality, affordable rental housing in Englewood. This bridges the gap in access to high-quality housing and fundamentally changes the infrastructure and aesthetics of the neighborhood.

VOA Illinois works with Englewood residents, community organizations, local leaders and funders to reimagine Englewood so that together we can create opportunities for Englewood residents to be stronger, more empowered and able to contribute to a more prosperous and safe community.

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more strategically and equitably

We are focusing on three initiatives in Englewood: Hope Manor II, Hope Manor Village and Englewood 21. The relationship between each of these strategies is what makes community revitalization in Englewood so effective. Each strategy serves as a lever to deepen the success and impact of each initiative.



*"My support of VOA's efforts in Englewood is driven by the focus to make a difference on a block by block basis so you can see and feel the impact being made. Additionally, the support of being an anchor in the community with Hope Manor II gives support that our efforts can have long term lasting effects."*

—Mrs. VERA BROWN, Board Chair

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### Hope Manor Village

Hope Manor Village revitalizes both the infrastructure and aesthetics of the 10 carousing blocks of Hope Manor II. Currently, Englewood has a significant number of vacant lots and abandoned and foreclosed homes. Our plan to address this challenge is to build vibrant Englewood one block at a time.

Hope Manor Village will provide new housing opportunities to Englewood residents and individuals and families that move to the neighborhood with four initiatives to create:

**High-quality, affordable rental homes**

By repurposing vacant residential units, we are revitalizing the community and bringing the gap in some of the high-quality affordable housing in Englewood. Our reworked 10 buildings into 70 apartment homes in a series of 2 and 3 bed buildings and will be considered permanent and supportive housing.



#### Hope Manor Village Brings the Larsons' Family Home

One of the 10 buildings in the Hope Manor Village, known as the "Larsons' Home", is for four bedrooms and two bathrooms in a three apartment structure with a fully finished 1st floor. When the Larsons moved into their apartment after living with family for over 10 years, they found their Hope Manor Village unit was completely new, bright, full of light and for four bedrooms. When the Larsons moved into their apartment, they found it was completely new, bright, full of light. In the living room, they found a kitchen island, a new refrigerator, and a new dishwasher. The Larsons are excited to have a home again in Englewood.

**Opportunities for homeownership**

Our next priority is to rehab abandoned and foreclosed homes to offer high-quality, affordable homeownership opportunities to residents in Englewood. We will target abandoned properties in the surrounding blocks around Hope Manor II and create single family homes.

In addition to equitable housing opportunities in Englewood, we need to create important resources and amenities that provide community stability and economic prosperity. This is why VOA Illinois launched our third initiative: Englewood 21.

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Englewood Community Leader

### Hope Manor II

VOA Illinois' impact in Englewood started with the three core Hope Manor II programs, one of the first large-scale, supportive housing developments in the country specifically designed for veterans and their families. Today, Hope Manor II provides homes to more than 70 veteran-headed households in Englewood.

Through our work with and in Englewood, we found that the abundance of vacant lots, abandoned homes and abandoned commercial buildings were presenting opportunities for the community to flourish and we launched two new initiatives: Hope Manor Village and Englewood 21.



#### Hope Manor II Veteran's Story

In 2011, the apartments at Hope Manor II started to open up. Ms. Parker was one of the first veterans to move in. Ms. Parker formed lasting friendships with her neighbors through the monthly when-to-use activities.

Over the years, Ms. Parker has able to take advantage of the many resources that Hope Manor II offers: the on-site laundry facility, fitness center, building meals, childcare, and much more. In 2018, Ms. Parker started working with a case manager on her goal of homeownership. Thanks to the community staff and management of Hope Manor II, Ms. Parker was able to take the next step in her journey to become a homeowner.

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### Englewood 21

Englewood 21 will repurpose an abandoned commercial building with a 10,000 square foot neighborhood hub that offers important amenities and resources that promote community integration, provide housing and employment opportunities for young people and support the development and acceleration of small businesses in Englewood.

The neighborhood hub will be accessible to all in Englewood and include:

- A **small business resource center** with access to conference rooms, collaboration and creative space, individual offices, work stations and state-of-the-art printing, scanning, and copying equipment as well as computers and audio-visual equipment
- **Business flexible community spaces** for local businesses and organizations to access on a micro-lease basis to grow and expand their impact in the community
- **Group meeting and event rooms** for community members to host events and gatherings
- A **technology-based teen collaboration center** that allows adolescents to engage in practice or professional projects and activities supported by state-of-the-art equipment, technology and mentorship support
- A **high-quality, indoor child enrichment center** where parents can bring their children to engage in safe, fun, indoor play and activities – either individually or in groups

In addition to this, the second floor of Englewood 21 will house the VOA Illinois headquarters and additional service center to support individuals and families in the neighborhood. The new VOA Illinois office will be an additional business space for the community and become the new work home for 70 VOA Illinois employees.



## Reinvest

Over the last eight years, VOA Illinois has invested more than \$42 million of capital into the Englewood neighborhood. We know that where we invest now in community transformation, we build a more equitable and prosperous future for all who live there.

**Together, we can:**

- Reverse decades of inequity in Englewood, leading to better housing, food, healthcare and education opportunities
- Reduce the number of vacant and abandoned lots, homes and commercial buildings, so that it's comparable to other Chicago neighborhoods
- Create a safe and economically vibrant community that promotes a high quality of life for all who live there

Our work is possible through close collaboration with Englewood residents, community organizations, local business and leaders, and now we need your support.



*"In order for Chicago to thrive, we need to ensure every community thrives. VOA IL's work in Englewood tackles this exact issue and we are proud to support them in their endeavor."*

—Cedric Belfrage, Author

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*"The work is important because while there is a lot of talk about what to do in communities like Englewood, there are not enough organizations willing to make the commitment to change. I choose to give because the work needs to be done now and it is undoubtedly the right thing to do."*

—DANA, VOA Illinois Board Chair

### VOA Illinois is raising \$1,000,000 to support transformation in Englewood.

When you partner with VOA Illinois, your donation contributes to the:



**Redevelopment of Englewood 21**  
Your donation supports the rehab of an abandoned commercial building into a 10,000 square foot neighborhood hub that will bring important neighborhood amenities and resources to all in Englewood.



**Expansion of Hope Manor Village**  
Your donation supports the repurposing of vacant residential lots and abandoned homes into high-quality, affordable housing for current and future residents to rent and buy in Englewood.

When you donate for VOA Illinois, you're supporting a safer, brighter and more equitable future for every individual in Englewood.

Will you help us reach our goal?

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Why it works: This case for support focuses on a very clear fundraising goal (\$1M) for a very specific purpose (transforming Chicago's Englewood neighborhood). It uses a theme of reimagine, rebuild, reinvest to bring donors along with the work they're doing in the neighborhood, and the work they could do with more support. Quotes are used heavily to allow the people VOA serves to tell their own stories, and several different program types are highlighted in order to appeal to a range of donors.

## Do you need more help with your case for support?

Drop us a note – we'd love to chat. You can also read more about our broader body of work with iMentor Chicago [here](#) and VOA Illinois [here](#).

