

Creating a Business Case

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Introduction

As a potential EMBA student, you are intellectually capable, ambitious and have already proved yourself with relevant experience as a manager. You have identified EMBA as the right program for your professional development and want to continue to build on your career while using and testing the knowledge and skills you will gain from an Executive MBA.

Columbia Business School is proud of the role EMBA plays in assisting a diverse range of organizations in developing their talented managers. This document is designed to help you structure your case for support.

There are no “magic formulas” that will guarantee support – but this document is designed to help you make a persuasive argument. A significant proportion of EMBA students have successfully negotiated funding contributions from their employers. We hope that this document will help you achieve the same success.

Section 1

a. Questions to ask before you start

Who will be making the decision? Our research tells us that normally there will be at least two other people apart from yourself involved in this – potentially your line manager, your HR manager, functional head, department head or even the CEO.

What level of support already exists? Your organization may already have a tested group of programs. Or you may have to make the case for an MBA from scratch. Position your case at the right level.

How does the program fit with the needs of the business?

Demonstrate how the key concerns and challenges of your business area can be met through the program's academic content and softer skills development. How does the program fit with my career development? Signal to your organization that you are serious about your development, and where the program content, the academic and softer skills development and the structure will enable you to achieve this.

Why EMBA? Our research tells us that the most effective examples of the three-way partnership between you, your employer and school will be to choose a reputable, highly regarded program that offers you rigorous and relevant content and a relationship that will enhance your personal and corporate brand.

What will I bring back to my organization? EMBA students can clearly show benefits from the earliest stages of the program, bringing back knowledge and perspectives from the program and their fellow students.

What commitment am I asking for? Don't leave gaps. Be clear and realistic on what you require in terms of funding support and time, and the requirements of the program.

What commitment will I be prepared to give? Employers may require a variety of commitments from lock-in periods post-program to agreements to refund tuition in the event of your leaving the organization. This is your opportunity to reinforce your own commitment to your organization and the contribution you will be making now and in the longer term.

Have I got all my facts assembled? Check with the admissions office to ensure that you have the latest fees, facts and figures to back up your case. Remember that EMBA is continually being evaluated and updated so find out about any innovations or changes since you first researched the program.

Am I prepared to persevere? Research tells us that a significant proportion of applications are turned down first time. Be prepared to go back and defend your case.

b. The starting point

You will always be the best judge of how the different components of the EMBA program meet the needs of your organization. Your challenge is to:

- show the value and benefits of EMBA to your organization, your unit, your department, your team and to yourself
- make a clear statement of what the commitment will be (financial and nonfinancial) from your workplace
- show what your commitment is in return, both during and after the program.

Where there is an existing process within your organization to gain nomination or apply for support for your development, make sure you are fully aware of the process, who manages this, and what critical deadlines are involved to ensure that you will be a competitive candidate. You may need to go through an internal application process first or may only be allowed to apply once you are assured of your place.

c. Creating a case

It is likely that you will already be familiar with writing comprehensive reports and analyses. A case requires you to be more structured, and to be relevant to your audience. The objective is to give the audience the information needed to be able to make a decision.

Who is your audience? The most usual combination of stakeholders will include your line manager, department head and HR manager. As you write your case, check on assumptions. How much does your audience know about the MBA world? What do they understand about Executive MBA formats?

You will have spent time analyzing and reviewing many business schools and programs. Ensure that you give enough information. If the knowledge level is low, the best place for detailed appendices, course descriptions, ranking information etc., is in a supplementary appendix.

d. Structure your case

Start with your proposition and recommendation and work backwards from this point, with an overview of the analysis and recommendation supported by detail.

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Section 2

a. Your business case

This is where you demonstrate, as persuasively as possible, clear business needs that can be met by EMBA.

- Do you need to make a case for an MBA?
- Or specifically for EMBA?

Although this is your business case, it is not (at this point) about you. It is about the needs of your business, the value of doing EMBA, the return on investment, and a recommendation that you should receive support for this.

b. The business need

Briefly outline key challenges, changes and predicted trends in your sector and workplace. This does not have to be detailed—but does need to be relevant. How does this translate to the goals of your unit, department, team and your own role and personal career objective?

Successful business case studies have been phrased in general terms or been highly specific. You need to know where to “pitch” this in your organization.

General: *“Our company needs employees with the appropriate management skills and techniques to enable them to be better managers and to provide an environment where staff can motivate themselves and take responsibility.”*

Specific:

- Rapid expansion through acquisition and/or mergers.
- Entering new markets and territories.
- Changes in regulatory environment.
- Maintain, sustain or growth of position.
- Developing human capital to a culture of innovation.

General: *"I will acquire better understanding of international management practices, and be prepared for a more senior role."*

Specific:

- Detailed understanding of company valuation process and investor relationships.
- Understanding new business cultures to establish offices in China.
- Make informed decision-making utilizing tools and frameworks.
- Build upon technical expertise to lead teams as a general manager.
- Obtain a market perspective on where our company stands within our sector.

c. Return on investment

Take ownership in discussions with your manager on what the expected return would be. Establish how your increased contribution will be measured both during and after the program at the level of getting and applying new skills and knowledge, and what the expected results would be at an organizational and/or personal level.

Data from rankings and research surveys indicates significant increases in responsibility levels for budgets, size of teams and other resources.

Hiring MBA candidates from outside the organization carries a cost implication in terms of time and effectiveness in a highly competitive marketplace.

Companies are increasingly measured and benchmarked in their policies and activities in supporting and developing employees into senior management and board-level positions.

You will effectively be the bridge linking your organization to:

- world-class faculty
- a program of annual events and activities
- networks across the School communities
- invitations to business speaker series
- contacts in research and consultancy.

d. Your analysis

The rationale for an EMBA is the next stage in the process. Support your choice by identifying the components of EMBA program that are particularly relevant to your organization's needs.

While it is tempting to show the entire program, it is likely that out of the business needs, there will be two, perhaps three areas that are particularly important or relevant to your case. They may also reflect your own business role and goals. As before, you have the option to be specific or general.

Curriculum – features of EMBA:

- a top-ranked, rigorous and highly-regarded program
- teaching from world-class faculty
- total integration of theory and practice
- acquire command of fundamental disciplines and management tools

- emphasis on applicability, breadth and depth of knowledge and skills
- emphasis on acquiring depth of understanding of business cultures in an international
- New York City affords credibility and understanding of multiple business environments

Interpersonal skills development:

- emphasis on strategy, leadership and personal development through team-based learning
- skills building to current and future job requirements

Network:

- close contact between faculty, industry and government organizations
- the diverse background of the students both in terms of organizations represented, work experience, academic background and nationality
- other participants will have relevant sustained experience and are able to share best practice
- instant access to a combined network of more than 64,000 alumni worldwide

Comparisons

This is the logical place to indicate your research into other programs, especially if there is a group of schools that your workplace has used before, or other good schools that are closer to your workplace. Many effective business cases present a brief table of schools reviewed, the final shortlist and data to support your proposal.

You may need to outline the case for EMBA:

- the ability to tap into resources, faculty and networks
- enhance your credibility and effectiveness in multiple business settings.

EMBA also offers the following advantages over a full-time MBA:

- minimizes disruption as you do not have to leave the organization (but be realistic about the extent of the workload)
- value of development of talented individuals where new MBA “hires” may not be effective within your existing organizational structure
- the opportunity to test theories in practice and develop your career while maintaining or growing managerial responsibilities
- a peer group with more sustained and relevant experience who is in employment and who will be facing or have successfully managed similar challenges to those you have identified

Company

Organizations who support employees in their pursuit of an MBA program is a clear signal of their commitment to succession planning and developing their management group.

Program Structure

EMBA-NY has two intakes each year:

	EMBA-Friday/Saturday	EMBA-Saturday
Class Days In Core	Every other Friday & Saturday	Every Saturday
Program Length	5 Terms, 20 months	6 Terms, 24 months
Courses Per Term	4	3-4
Residence Periods	5 Days, Terms 1-2	Fri-Sun, Terms 1-3
Start Date	August	May

e. Recommendation

At this point, you will have:

- shown the business need
- provided the analysis of program choice to resolve meeting the need

Now you come to the recommendation of yourself as a suitable candidate for support. Even though this is about your case for support, you will still need to ensure that you highlight the aspects of your personal development that are most important in the context of the business need and your career development plans.

General:

“There is a clear business trend in the marketplace to value the qualification of an MBA. This can be seen in the increasing desire of companies to employ and develop people with all-round business

knowledge in addition to their technical expertise. Our company is no different as it is important for managers to be far more than specialists in their own fields—we need business managers as opposed to managers of business functions.”

“I believe that it is the right time to undertake an MBA program because I do not wish to be restricted to technical management positions and the program will increase my opportunities to enter the more commercial side of the business. Although I have the necessary industry experience and knowledge, I cannot progress to more senior positions without the commercial and marketing skills acquired through an MBA. The MBA will equip me to have the transferable skills to handle project management in any fields, and work at a strategic level anywhere within our organization.”

Specific:

“As a manager/executive in X department, I am tasked with delivering on ...

*“I have demonstrated experience, skills and strengths in ...
I have achieved ...*

This is a solid grounding on which to develop my skills and knowledge of

I have had the benefit of attending courses in (example) with the following outcomes...”

If your workplace already offers significant development opportunities through various courses, you will need to clarify why EMBA is preferable to taking a number of short non-degree courses in specific subjects, attending a corporate university or doing an MBA with another recognized school.

If you have already benefited from such courses, you will want to show clearly how you have translated the learning and experience into tangible results in your current role.

The value to you:

- improve my career prospects within the company
- opportunity to diversify within the company
- improve chances for promotion
- enhance my standing within the company and protect current employment prospects

Therefore, EMBA will offer value to the organization and to you personally.

Undertaking an MBA program is a major commitment. You will need to demonstrate, in a way that is appropriate for your workplace, the level of your personal commitment to doing the program, to your workplace, and how this aligns with your ambitions to take on specific roles/responsibilities and your own desire for learning and development.

Section 3

a. Support request

While there are varying levels of commitment, to gain the most value in an EMBA program, there is a strong need for support in three key areas:

1. Project work

Your employer should be prepared to offer work-related projects that will allow the application of the concepts learned on the EMBA program to the organization. Projects enable the student to apply their learning, facilitate the transfer of learning back to the workplace, measure the return on investment, get insights from fellow students and faculty, and may be used to expose the student to different parts of the business and different teams.

2. Financial support

Please see the website for the current tuition fee and details of what is covered by the fees.

Tuition fees include:	Additional costs include:
Course materials and course textbooks Meals on class days (breakfast, lunch, and snack) Accommodations during weeks in residence Residence and meals during week-long International Seminar in the second year	Airfare for the International Seminary and any travel throughout the program Laptop computer

You can show the financial request within the case, or in an appendix attached to the case. Be realistic about the costs and supplementary costs. You may also need to request additional funds for accommodation, for travel, for materials, or for an international seminar.

Look at funding options so you have a “package” to request and can offer different positioning. Outside of 100 per cent funding, students on recent intakes have been financially supported in a variety of ways, including matching funding, percentage splits, reduced hours, tuition reimbursement at key stages or after successful completion of parts one and two, and bonus payments.

If you are paying part of the tuition yourself, we offer a staged payment schedule to spread your payments over the program. Please contact the admissions team to discuss this schedule.

Invoicing Stages

A deposit will be required to secure your place. This is usually paid by the candidate and reimbursed by the company but can be invoiced on request. There is a five-payment plan for EMBA-Friday/Saturday by term, and a six-payment plan for EMBA-Saturday by term: payment is due before each of the terms begins. You will be billed by the University's Student Financial Services (SFS) office.

3. Time

In the business case, you will need to show how you will manage the time out of the office, and what you will do to minimize the impact on your team or clients. Remember to include the residence periods, the required international seminar, any travel time and what your requirement is likely to be for study and research, which we estimate as at least 15-20 hours per week.

Allow time off to complete studies, but also to be aware that deadlines may conflict with business needs. Indicate clearly in your request the extent of the time required, and whether you will be using any personal time (agreed study days, unpaid leave, vacation, lieu time) for this.

It may be helpful to put the detailed schedules into an appendix, and to give a short table within the business case showing the requirements for EMBA and, if appropriate, comparison with any other programs.

b. Commitment and Conclusion

Your statement of commitment is critical and should show your commitment to the organization, and to being a successful student on the program. There are a variety of ways of demonstrating this commitment, and agreements will most typically encompass lock-in periods, reimbursement of tuition and other costs (whole or percentage) if you leave during or within a specified period after the program.

"I am willing to commit to the time and dedication needed to complete the program and to undertake specific company projects. The projects undertaken can be discussed with senior managers and can be tailored to reflect strategic areas currently needing analysis in the business."

"I would be willing to accept an addendum to my contract specifying a period of work after successful completion of the MBA or undertaking to refund the costs of the program if I should leave immediately after the program is completed."

This commitment ensures that you take responsibility for your learning and repay the investment that will have been made in you.

Companies that want to develop and retain their top talent will actively create opportunities and planned career transitions for their top management pools, both during and after completing the program. While it is unlikely that a commitment of a specific role or project will be given at this stage, you must start this dialogue as soon as feasible.

Section 4

a. Electives

EMBA emphasizes applying theory to practice, and relating this back to the sponsoring company, in the form of electives in your second year. Your choice of classes can be discussed with senior managers and be tailor-made to your needs. Additionally, your course work can be used as a launch pad to pursue areas of interest within your workplace, and explore areas that you would be interested in working in afterwards.

Conclusion

The EMBA admissions team hopes you will find this information useful in guiding the sponsorship discussion with your organization, allowing them to become partners in your development and the program experience.

If you have further questions, please contact the Admissions Office:
Columbia Business School Executive MBA Program
apply@gsb.columbia.edu
(212) 854-1961

We wish you every success in your application and proposal.

Appendix

a. A case model for those who have not written case models before

Title Page	A cover page giving the title and the author, and the date of the report. Presented/Circulated to (names and titles)
List of Contents	Numbered headings and subheadings (e.g. 2., and 2.1, 2.2), may be combined with title page for a short report.
Executive Summary	A brief summary of the subject of the report and recommendations.
Introduction	The objectives of the report and the problems it is to address. It may give background information, (e.g. the objectives of the company, or the reason for some strategy they have pursued).
Analysis	An analysis of the existing situation; identification of problems, causes and patterns; statement of assumptions.
Evaluation of Alternatives	It is likely that there will be several options to be considered (including doing nothing). Each of these alternatives will have its pros and cons. This section identifies and evaluates each of them.
Recommendations and Implementation Strategies	A statement and justification of the recommendation, with the steps needed to implement it. This should include the likely effect of following your proposals, and any possible circumstances that might make them inappropriate (indicating things that will need monitoring), together with what to do if those circumstances come about.
Exhibits and Appendices	Detailed figure analysis can best be shown in tabular or graph form as exhibits or appendices. Even qualitative information may be best shown in exhibit form. If this is done economically, it can be put into the body of the report; larger tables or figures may have to be appendices. But beware: do not put anything in an appendix that is not referred to in the main text, or that is not key to your argument.

b. Extract from a business case used by an EMBA student who successfully secured sponsorship

Program Highlights

- EMBA-Friday/Saturday starts August 2023 and lasts 20 contiguous months.
- Application deadline for early admissions: mid-March.
- Classes are alternating Fridays and Saturdays. See the EMBA brochure for more details.

Why I would like to pursue EMBA

EMBA is an excellent opportunity for my personal and career growth. Organization X will also be able to benefit from my informed experiences. As part of the curriculum, I will be collaborating on company-related projects with students who are proven leaders within their respective industries. Also, the courses are taught by some of the leading thinkers of our time (e.g. Joseph Stiglitz), and the valuable insight from these resources will undoubtedly be something I will be able to bring back to Organization X.

I have been employed at Organization X for nine years and have a significant amount of experience. On the other hand, I do not have experience working in the same capacity outside of Organization X. EMBA will expose me to how other companies run their businesses (management, finance, technology, best practices, strategy, etc.).

At the moment, Organization X hires external consulting firms to lead and advise on projects. In general, we spend a significant amount of time to get the hired team up to speed and understand the documented and undocumented ways we do business. One of the reasons why we need to hire an outside firm is that our internal management does not have the external, cross-industry, or global experience, which the consulting firm has.

A good solution to this is to educate Organization X employees who are capable, enthusiastic, and determined to gain a similar perspective, which these consulting firms are reputed to have. By investing the time in EMBA while continuing to work at Organization X, I can deliver the best of both worlds.

I believe that EMBA, alongside my work within Organization X, will give me a broader perspective on how to solve the tactical and strategic problems as we position ourselves for success. There are many more reasons why I would like to pursue EMBA, which we can discuss in more detail if you would like.

What I need from Organization X

In order to continue with the application process, I need the following:

- **Time Commitment:** I must have a written letter of sponsorship that approves the time commitment to the program. Over the course of 20 months, I am required to spend an average of 3 days per month in the classroom. As you can see in the attached timetable, most classes are Fri-Sat.
- **Financial:** As we discussed, the details can be worked out at a later date.

Organization X students/alumni

- List of Organization X employees who are students or alumni of EMBA.