

Building the Case To Get Your Education Sponsored

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Introduction

This document gives you specific tools that can empower you to take control of the process in your organization for requesting financial support to fund your education.

Read it carefully and create your own education sponsorship case for the Master of Advanced Studies in Humanitarian Logistics and Management (MASHLM) program at the Università della Svizzera italiana (USI).

You may have done research and already know a good deal about USI and MASHLM. Every year, participants successfully secure financial support for the MASHLM tuition from their organizations.

We have compiled this comprehensive guide based on the experiences of past participants who received sponsorship to help you build a personalized case to present to your employer. We know that building a coherent and compelling sponsorship case is crucial to your success when approaching any organization for sponsorship.

Many organizations, when approached with such a request may ask, 'why should we invest in you?' and 'what's in it for us?' This guide can help you answer these questions so that your organization is fully informed of the benefits of the MASHLM program in the key areas of supply chain management, process and project management, strategic management, and humanitarian action.

We hope this guide provides a useful framework to build your case. There is no guarantee, but thorough preparation and perseverance have paid off for our sponsored participants.

Good Luck!



Questions Before You Start

- **Who will be making the sponsoring decision?** It could be a number of individuals, Human Resources Officers, Line Managers, and even Chief Executive Officers. It is likely that more than one person will be making the decision.
- **What level of support already exists?** Your organization may already have supported previous employees at an executive program or the MASHLM. Contact us at mashlm@usi.ch to see if your organization has sponsored employees at MASHLM in the past. We can also let you know if any of our alumni are currently working at your organization.
- **How does the program fit the needs of the business?** It will add strength to your case if you can clearly demonstrate how the key concerns and challenges of your business area can be met through the program content, the academic and softer skills development, and the structure.
- **How does the program fit with my career development?** By seeking to further your qualifications, you signal to your organization that you are serious about your own personal development and demonstrate the motivation to move up in the organization. Emphasize how the program will enable you to maximize your full potential.
- **Why join the MASHLM in Switzerland?** MASHLM alumni have been rewarded with greater responsibility and promotions. Learning from experts and scholars from leading universities and humanitarian organizations including MIT, Georgia Tech, USAID, and the Red Cross, through a proven mix of interactive and innovative teaching methods, such as games, simulations and case studies, you engage with experienced humanitarian professionals, gaining skills and confidence.
- **What will I bring back to my organization?** MASHLM participants show clear benefits from the earliest stages of the program, bringing back fresh knowledge, techniques, frameworks, and insights which can be implemented immediately in the workplace.
- **What commitment am I asking for?** Be clear and realistic about what you require concerning funding support and time, and the requirements of the program. Be prepared to respond to any concerns your organization may have. It may be worthwhile providing several different options, such as partial funding.
- **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 you leave the organization. This is your opportunity to reinforce your long-term commitment to your organization. If you are approaching Human Resources (HR) or a Senior Manager, it may be worthwhile including a reference or letter of support from your current Line Manager.
- **Have I got all my facts assembled?** Check that you have the latest fees, facts, and figures to back up your case, by visiting our website <http://www.mashlm.usi.ch/admission>
- **Am I prepared to persevere?** Research tells us that a significant proportion of requests for sponsorship are turned down the first time. In case your sponsorship is denied at first, do not stop. Get some feedback if possible, and approach them with a second offer and maybe even a third. We face the same issue with our research funding.

If at first you don't succeed, try, try again.



The Starting Point

You will always be the best judge of how the MASHLM program meets the needs of your organization. Your challenge is to:

- Clearly identify and demonstrate the value and benefits of the program to your organization, your unit, your department, your team and to yourself;
- Make a comprehensive statement of the commitment (financial and non-financial) required from your employer;
- Illustrate your commitment to them in return, both during and after the program.

If there is an existing process within your organization or special initiatives that you can apply for to support your professional development, make sure you are fully aware of the process:

- Who manages it?
- What critical deadlines are involved to ensure that you will be a competitive candidate?

Preparing a case

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

Consider your audience: Whom are you trying to convince? The most usual combination of stakeholders will include your Line Manager, Department Head and HR Manager. As you write your case, check your assumptions. How much does your audience know about the Executive MASHLM at USI?

Sponsorship Case Framework

Below you can find a framework to build your sponsorship case. It is structured and tested to give a comprehensive and persuasive case to your employer, while easy systematic to follow.



Sponsorship Case Framework

1. Title Page	A cover page with the title, author and date of report.
2. List of contents	
3. Executive Summary	A brief summary of the report with defined recommendations. (Do this last)
4. Introduction	The objectives of the report and the issues to be addressed.
5. Analysis	<p>An analysis of the existing situation; identification of issues, causes and patterns; statement of assumptions.</p> <p>In this situation, you may wish to focus on the challenges faced by your organization or team. Focus on challenges that can be addressed by studying in the program, though you would not refer to the program specifically at this stage.</p>
6. Evaluation of Alternatives	<p>It is likely that there are several options to consider (including doing nothing). This section would identify each of these alternatives and, for each, present the case for and against.</p> <p>You should include an evaluation of other programs you have researched, if any, and/or other learning and development options available to you.</p>
7. Recommendations and Implementation Strategies	A statement and justification of the recommendation including clear implementation steps. This should include the likely effect of following your sponsorship proposal, and any circumstances that could cause objections, together with what to do if those circumstances occur (potential constraints that need comprehension from your employer such as time away from work).
8. Exhibits and Appendices	Detailed analysis can best be shown in tabular or graphic form as exhibits or appendices. You should also provide information on the program, including as much information as you deem necessary to support your case. Avoid superfluous documentation, which is not directly referenced in your case.



Analysis

5.1 The organizational need

Outline the major challenges, changes and trends in your sector and organization. This should be current and succinct. Consider how this relates to the objective of your department/team, individual role and your personal development.

It is important that you are able to successfully identify where to 'pitch' your business case in your organization. You should consider whether to be general or more specific in your phrasing, for example.

General analysis example:

"Our organization needs employees with the appropriate management skills and techniques to enable them to be better managers and to provide an environment where staff are motivated and embrace responsibility"

Specific needs and challenges examples:

Expanding, relocating warehouse network

Streamlining procurement process to reduce lead-time

Optimizing budget allocation in transportation

Adapting to changes in regulatory environment

Developing and maintaining stakeholder relationships

Planning for disaster response in conflict areas

5.2 Your analysis

Once you have defined the business need and return on investment, the next step is to conduct your analysis. Support your choice to pursue a master's degree by identifying the components most relevant to your organization.

Avoid the temptation to list the program in its entirety. It is likely that two or three aspects of the program are particularly relevant for addressing your organization's needs.

For example:

PROGRAM FEATURE	RETURN ON INVESTMENT
Diverse, experienced and international participants.	Effectively integrate new project team based in West Africa.
Skills development in team building and leadership.	Reduce delivery time of medical supplies by 10% in next 10 months.
Decision-making and risk analysis.	Conduct feasibility study for relocating warehouse hub to Asia.



5.3 Recommendation

At this point, your business case should:

- Show the business need
- Show the analysis of how your advanced education will help the organization meet its objectives

Now you need to make a strong statement for why you are a suitable candidate for support. Even though this is about your case for getting financial support for education, you still need to ensure that you highlight those aspects of your personal development that are most important in the context of the business need and your career development plans.

General recommendation example:

'I believe that it is the right time for me to pursue a Master's in Humanitarian Logistics and Management because I do not wish to restrict myself to functional roles. Although I have the necessary industry experience and knowledge, I cannot progress to positions that are more senior without the managerial and advanced technical skills. The MASHLM will equip me with a broad range of hard and soft skills, together with management education so that I can face the challenges present at a strategic level anywhere within our organization.'

Specific needs examples:

'As a manager in X department, I am tasked with delivering on...'

'To date, within our organization I have achieved...'

'In order to progress within the organization, it is vital I develop X skills....'

If your organization offers internal development programs or even external training with other institutions, you may need to clarify why the MASHLM at USI would be preferable to other development programs.

Added value for you:

- Increase promotion and long-term career prospects within the organization;
- Opportunity to diversify within the organization and take on new challenges;
- Enhance standing within the organization and protect employment prospects.

Added value for the organization:

- Improve department's performance by applying advanced techniques;
- Access to latest research in the humanitarian sector;
- Support from expert faculty in designing innovative solutions for current issues.



Evaluation of Alternatives

6.1 Your sponsorship case

Your sponsorship case is your opportunity to demonstrate the clear operational needs which can be met through the MASHLM.

Consider the following questions:

- Why specifically the MASHLM program?
- Why USI University in Switzerland?
- How will my experience in this program benefit my organization?

Your business case should address the needs of your organization, focusing on the value of the MASHLM and the return on investment. Make sure your recommendation to receive support is backed-up by well-researched, coherent analysis.

6.2 Return on investment

Make sure you clearly articulate to your manager your expected returns. Define measurements to assess how your contribution will increase during or after the program in terms of skills and knowledge acquired that will benefit both the organization and you as an individual.

It is important to highlight the overall benefits for your organization of establishing links with MASHLM. As their MASHLM ambassador on campus, you can be the bridge linking your organization to world-class faculty, researchers and the global alumni network. You could even help your organization recruit top MASHLM talent.

Final Thesis customized to support your organization

The MASHLM at USI emphasizes applying the theories learned and relating them back to the sponsoring organization, in the form of the thesis.

The thesis is a comprehensive report involving personal research that can be designed to support a novel project for your employer and is supervised by a member of the Humanitarian Operations Faculty or Academic Network. Many participants choose their research question based on a specific issue that their organization is facing. Research and analysis can be linked to your workplace, and will benefit not only you, but also your department and organization as a whole.

The thesis can be discussed with senior management and can be tailor-made to reflect strategic areas currently needing analysis in the business. Additionally, the report can be used as a launch pad to move ahead in your current area of interest and explore other areas within your organization that are of interest for you in the future.

This required report could give your organization access our expert faculty and research team to resolve or support the issues raised.



6.3 Program structure

The MASHLM schedule is designed based on feedback from previous participants to maximize your time in class while minimizing your time away from work. The blocks are evenly split across two calendar years: three blocks in the fall, and 3 blocks in the spring/summer so that you finish the entire program in one year. Block sessions are condensed into an intensive seven-day session that keeps you away for less time and thus reduces your costs.

Emphasize the content of the six blocks with clear dates for traveling.

6.4 Key features

MASHLM is an executive style program designed for humanitarian professionals who wish to enhance their careers and add to their qualifications.

You can immediately apply the tools you learn in your work, creating a positive impact in your organization.

By studying at MASHLM, you gain access to an active network of professionals that are engaged in humanitarian action and can support you in current and future projects.

The master's degree, the network, and the tools place you in a strong position for promotion in your organization.

Ties to our research team, expert faculty, and global humanitarian organizations give you the possibility to continue learning through your future projects at work or collaborators on inter-organizational research projects.

(Ask us for help to link our key features with your business needs)



Recommendation and Implementation Strategies

7.1 Support request

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

1. Financial support

Go to the following page for up to date information regarding tuition fees:

<http://www.mashlm.usi.ch/admission>

You may also need to request additional funds for accommodation, travel, and materials. Look at funding options so you have a “package” to request and can offer different positioning.

Participants in 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 the semester, or with bonus payments.

a. Salary Sacrifice Scheme

The Salary Sacrifice Scheme is when an employer pays full or part tuition on your behalf directly to the university. You then come to an agreement with the employer that they either pay upfront and you sacrifice your salary increases over a period of time, or you can set up the agreement in advance to build up a bank of credit to be used towards tuition once you start the program.

2. Time away from work

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 effect on your team or clients. Remember to include the each residential block week, the assignments and any travel time.

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

It may be helpful to put the detailed schedules into an appendix, and to give a short table within the sponsorship case showing the requirements for MASHLM.

Go to the following page for sample schedule: <http://www.mashlm.usi.ch/schedule>

- ***Be sure to highlight the fact that you will be studying part-time thus remain in full-time employment. Since you will be applying what you learn at the workplace, this is a very important negotiating point.***

3. Commitment and conclusion



Your statement of commitment is critical and should show your commitment to the organization, and to succeeding in the program.

There are a variety of ways to demonstrate this commitment; agreements typically encompass lock-in periods, reimbursement of tuition and other costs (whole or in part) if you leave during or within a specified period after the program.

Example:

"I would be willing to accept an addendum to my contract specifying the commitment to a period of work after successful completion of the MASHLM, and agreeing to fully pay back the program costs if I should leave immediately after the program"

This commitment ensures that you take responsibility for your learning and intend to repay the investment that has been made for you by your company.

Final Checklist

- Do I know who to speak to? Have I considered their various possible reactions?
- Have I found out about official company policies?
- Have I networked with others in my organization who have done comparable programs?
- Have I decided on the best time to make my first approach to the key stakeholders?
- Am I able to explain how the program addresses specific needs in the organization?
- Can I explain how the program addresses my career development within the organization?
- Am I clear about the benefits that this program will bring to my employer?
- Do I know exactly what kinds of support I'm requesting?
- Am I able to explain exactly why I'm asking for this support?
- Do I know my own negotiating position and the compromises I'm ready to accept?
- Have I made some contingency plans in case the answer is "no"?



Contacts

We hope this guide is helpful and wish you the very best of luck!

If you require further information about MASHLM to support your education sponsorship case, do not hesitate to contact us.

Should your employer wish to have a direct point of contact at MASHLM to answer any questions or concerns they have, or to build a relationship us, we would be delighted to speak with them.

Humanitarian Operations team

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