

Writing a household case study

What is a household case study?

A household case study is a short piece of writing which tells a true story about the experiences of a person or household your organisation is engaging with.

Why write a household case study?

A household case study is a powerful way to convey to those beyond your organisation – including local and national decisions makers, funders and organisations in different sectors - the experiences of the people your organisation is engaging with. These may be experiences which the reader has little or no lived experience of – household case studies help them to develop a greater understanding particular experiences and challenges faced by the people you are engaging with.

At times it may be appropriate to use a household case study to highlight the sort of needs your organisation addresses and the difference you are making to a person's life.

Household case studies are particularly useful when presented alongside statistics. They can bring added 'life' to the narrative your organisation is telling about a particular situation.

How should a household case study be structured?

The structure of a household case study depends on the intended audience. The following basic case study structure is intended as a guide only.

Step 1: Introduce the key relevant facts about the person or household the case study is about. This may include approximate ages, gender, approximate geographical location or household make-up. As outlined below care needs to be taken to avoid identification.

For example: "Mr Rothery is a member of a food pantry in North Liverpool. He is in his 70's and lives alone."

Step 2: Present the situation you want to highlight in the case study. Where possible use plain English and avoid abbreviations or overly emotive language.

For example: "Upon the death of her husband, Mrs Vishey applied for Universal Credit. Whilst waiting for her first payment, Mrs Vishey accessed South Liverpool foodbank three times"

Step 3: Outline the personal consequences of the situation – how did the situation impact the household? Where possible, remain factual. Indicate if a perceived consequence has been told to you directly.

For example: "As the Dacy's household income was significantly reduced during this time, the oldest two children were unable to attend their usual after school activities" or "Miss Smith explained to our support worker that losing her job has caused her acute anxiety"

Step 4: Add a direct quote from a member of the household if appropriate.

For example: "Ms. Pall described this was a 'very challenging time, sometimes I've had to skip meals'"

Step 5: If appropriate to the audience, finish a case study by adding the difference the work of your organisation has made to this situation.

For example: "Our community centre has supported the McDonagh family with weekly fresh fruit package over the school holidays. This has increased their access to nutritious food."

How long should a household case study be?

The best case studies are often short but direct. 70 – 150 words is usually plenty to convey the key elements of the case study.

Should case studies be anonymous?

It is often appropriate for household case studies to be anonymous. Household case studies often centre on challenging situations, it can be difficult for either the household or the organisation writing the case study to fully predict the consequences of sharing the case study, therefore anonymity is advised.

Care should be taken to avoid:

- including identifiable information such as real names or exact ages
- providing details of overly specific circumstances which could lead to identification
- inadvertently providing accumulating identifiable details, for example despite anonymising the name it may be easy to deduce the identify of a case study about "Mrs Kumar, from Pakistan, who is a member of Christ Church food pantry in Norris Green and has six children".

It is best practice to ask the household's permission to write an anonymous case study about their experiences, and where possible ensure they are happy with the content before it is used.

At times a partner organisation or local or national decision makers may want to follow up on the situation described in your case study, to work towards a resolution for the household. In these circumstances, permission must be sought directly from the household.