“Build your case for the MBA around the culture of your company so there is a shared motivation for it.”

— Chicago Booth Executive MBA Student

Working with your employer for support to enroll in an Executive MBA Program is a crucial part of your preparation process. A thorough understanding between yourself and your company of the expected benefits and time commitments involved will ensure a smooth experience from start to finish.

All Executive MBA students must receive support for time away from the office from their employers. In addition to that, some Executive MBA students also receive financial support. Although financial support has declined in recent years (39% of Chicago Booth Executive MBA students received some form of sponsorship in 2016), there is still reason to believe that you can successfully secure financial sponsorship from your company. Constructing an organized, savvy business case outlining the benefits of doing an Executive MBA Program to your employer will help you to secure both time and financial support.

We have compiled the following guide to help you write your own business case. We’ve spoken to a number of Executive MBA students who have shared their experiences and best advice for approaching employers. In this guide, you will find ways to illustrate the benefits of studying for an MBA to your employer, how your participation can positively affect the business, why you have chosen Chicago Booth for your studies, and how an MBA connects to your personal career goals. While there can be no guarantees about the outcome, we hope that with careful preparation and planning, you will be successful.
1 | Summary

Introduce your business case for the MBA by clearly stating your rationale for pursuing the Executive MBA Program at Chicago Booth.

Provide a high-level summary of the document and lay out all areas you will address:

- Company Benefits
- Program Highlights
- Logistics
- Personal Development
- Sponsorship

2 | Company Benefits

Explain how studying for an MBA will help you be a better employee and help the company achieve its goals.

It’s important that this section focus on your employer, not you. You can bring some specificity to this space by outlining the demands of your current position and your goals for the future. Then, illustrate how studying for an MBA will help you to accomplish those goals and reach benchmarks for the company.

For example, one entering Executive MBA student assumed a new leadership role supervising over 125 people in the research and development department. Although he had 14 years of experience, his background was primarily a scientific one. He was now responsible for a large number of personnel and, even more perplexing, his CFO expected him to have a thorough understanding of the financials involved. In his business case, he argued that an MBA would provide him with the training and practice he needed to effectively lead his new team. Chicago Booth could also provide him with a thorough understanding of the fundamentals of business—financial accounting, statistics, and microeconomics—to make good financial decisions on behalf of his department. He was able to secure financial support from the company after agreeing that he would stay in his role for at least two years. He also had to maintain a specific GPA in order to maintain sponsorship.

Succession planning is another reason why many high-potential employees are sponsored for an MBA. Another Executive MBA student applied for the program
after being singled out for a leadership track within her company. She used the job description for her next role—one that she was a few years away from attaining—to write her business case. In this way, she was able to make specific correlations between studying for an MBA and creating future value for the company.

Here are a few other rationales used to explain how studying for an MBA creates value for your employer:

- **Ability to work on business issues**
  Throughout the program, students can bring their company's problems or business issues to the classroom for discussion and input from other highly trained, intelligent business leaders.

- **Leadership development**
  At Chicago Booth, students cultivate a distinct and deeply personal leadership style through the LEAD Program, one of the first experiential leadership programs at a major business school.

- **A thorough grounding in business fundamentals**
  Many enter the Executive MBA Program from very senior positions in their company but have skill gaps. The MBA Program at Chicago Booth provides intensive training around the essential business foundations: financial accounting, statistics, and microeconomics.

- **Study of essential functions**
  Prepare for the C-suite by taking a deep dive into the functions that drive business. Classes on corporate finance, financial strategy, marketing management, pricing, and operations management provide a basis for high-level decision making.

- **Access to a global network**
  The Executive MBA Program at Chicago Booth takes place on three international campuses in Chicago, London, and Hong Kong and enrolls students from over 56 different countries. The Chicago Booth network is a global one, extending to 115 different countries where our alumni live and work. Access to this network can serve as a business resource for you and, by proxy, for your company.
• Foster a partnership
  Your leadership team may be interested in forming a partnership with one of the leading business schools in the world. Your participation in the Executive MBA Program at Chicago Booth presents an opportunity for your employer to learn more about our corporate relationships.

3 | Program Highlights

✔ Explain why Chicago Booth is the best program to meet your and your company’s goals.

This section should demonstrate why you chose Chicago Booth for your MBA. Start at the beginning by outlining your considerations—given the company benefits above, what components did you feel were essential for your MBA experience? From there, identify which schools you looked at and how you evaluated them. Utilize program websites, media articles, and relevant industry data. If you contacted business school alumni in your network, provide synopses of those conversations, particularly if they were conducted with employees at your company. If you attended information sessions or met with admissions directors, you may also wish to include your impressions.

Once you have laid out your research methods, you can begin to demonstrate why Chicago Booth is the best place for you to study. It’s important that you clearly define the program differentiators and explain why they are meaningful to you and to the company.

One sponsored Executive MBA student at Chicago Booth chose to stress the importance of the cohort structure in the Chicago Booth program. The program timeline at each campus allows ample opportunity to study and spend time with classmates. This was important for him, since he felt that spending time with other experienced professionals, from diverse backgrounds and experiences, was integral to the challenging experience he was looking for.

Another student chose to highlight the elective choices available to Chicago Booth students. In the Executive MBA Program, students do not have to bid on electives—they can register from a wide array of elective courses which take place over two consecutive weeks in Chicago. He emphasized Chicago Booth’s focus on innovation and also the ability to specialize in one of six areas of study.
Another critical differentiator you may wish to include is our pure Chicago Booth approach. As a student in the Executive MBA Program, you will have access to the same world-renowned faculty who teach in the Full-Time MBA Program in Chicago. Rather than partner with a local institution, our faculty travel to London and Hong Kong for class, ensuring the same high-quality education around the globe.

4 | Logistics

Use your case to demonstrate how going to school part-time and working full-time will actually work.

Your employer will be anxious to understand how an MBA program will impact your time and performance on the job. Make it easy for them by providing everything up front: a summary of the program timeline, a schedule of your classes, and a plan for how you will manage your responsibilities.

Program timeline
The 21-month Executive MBA Program has been designed to ensure you have time to learn the material, study with classmates, and network with the Booth community. It’s also optimized to allow you the flexibility and space to continue with your professional responsibilities.

The program begins with three one-week sessions held in Chicago, London, and Hong Kong for all students. This marks the start of your MBA education and offers valuable time for you to connect with and foster relationships among your classmates at our global campuses.

From there, you will take courses according to your home campus schedule. In Chicago, classes are held on Friday and Saturday every other week. In London and Hong Kong, classes take place Monday to Saturday during class weeks that occur roughly once a month. You may wish to note that students have the flexibility to switch campuses for a class week should it suit their schedules and/or work obligations. Many students have taken advantage of this to the benefit of their employers.

Schedule of classes
It’s recommended that you provide your employer with a schedule of classes up front. One student mentioned that it was critical for him to communicate the schedule as early as possible, so as to alleviate any surprises on the employer’s behalf.
Personal management plan
Executive MBA students have stressed how important it is to analyze your personal situation prior to approaching your employer about support. A foundation of trust and credibility should be well established between you, your leadership team, and the people you supervise. This will provide assurance on all accounts that you will continue to deliver high-quality work throughout your MBA Program.

Use this space to detail how you will manage and delegate responsibilities while attending classes. One student advises that it’s best to be honest about the risk involved; it’s possible that you won’t have a handle on the day-to-day while classes are in session. Make sure to address any concerns your employer has about this by describing the team you have in place and how you will utilize them.

Another aspect to consider is client relationships. If you are responsible for a number of client interactions, address how you will handle that. This might mean that you carve out time to check in with clients during class weeks or identify a company representative who can do so in your place. Show that you have thought this through and that any client interaction will be seamless.

5 | Personal Development

Outline your own development goals through the pursuit of an MBA.

Begin by offering a clear statement on what your objectives are and how they correspond to your career plans. Below is an example for how this could read:

My main objective in studying for an MBA is to further develop my leadership skills and prepare to be a senior executive who drives change and innovation through the business.

I have followed an accelerated trajectory since joining the company in 2006. This has resulted from consistently high performance evaluations and shows that I am recognized as a leader with potential both internally and externally. Currently, I’m at a point in my career where I can see my next steps and the tools I need to get there.

Studying for an MBA aligns with my personal development plan and overall career goals. I believe that I have the potential to succeed in a senior leadership position in the company, and the skills I will learn and practice
During an MBA will be critical to developing that potential. In addition, the pursuit of an MBA echoes our company’s commitment towards career growth and employee development.

This is the opportunity for you to make your case more personal. You may wish to add details around passions or strengths you want to explore through the pursuit of an MBA. You can also show your aptitude for this type of work—one student included transcripts from Executive Education courses he took to show a record of interest and academic performance. Another student pointed out that studying business fundamentals in a highly competitive environment would push him further and give him more of what he needed versus hiring a career coach. Finally, this is also a time to be humble. Show your self-awareness by addressing gaps that you know exist, and discuss how an MBA will enable you to improve on them. One student mentioned a weakness in his presentation skills. He pointed out that the collaborative classwork, culture of debate, and training through LEAD at Chicago Booth would all help him to address this shortcoming.

6 | Support

Outline clearly what financial help and workplace accommodations you need from your company.

Now that you have made your case, you should be clear about what you are asking for from your company. This can be divided into two categories of support, depending on the business environment you are in: time and financial.

Time
All entering Executive MBA students at Chicago Booth are asked to provide a letter of company support certifying that they will be allowed to attend class meetings. This is meant to provide a clear understanding between you and your employer about the time commitment you are making.

Given that you have already described the program schedule and your plan to manage your responsibilities, you can use this space to formally ask your employer for the support in doing that. You should also indicate clearly whether you will be using personal days, unpaid leave, vacation days, or some other arrangement to account for your time away. Executive MBA students who have secured this support recommend touching base with your direct supervisor and the human resources department early on so that you have all the information you need to make the formal request.
Financial

Give some thought to how much financial support you will require to complete the Executive MBA Program so you can provide an exact figure to your employer. You will want to lay out the most recent tuition costs and also factor in additional costs incurred, such as travel expenses and accommodations (course materials are already factored into your tuition costs, as well as accommodations for the first three class weeks in Chicago, London, and Hong Kong).

It’s a good idea to make this ask at an appropriate time for your company; for example, you’ll want to avoid bringing up the matter of financial support just after budgets for the fiscal year have been finalized.

Executive MBA students have brokered a broad range of financial support agreements with their companies. Some receive full support while others are able to secure a percentage of tuition funds paid or reimbursed. This will likely be a negotiation between you and your employer to reach the best possible solution. With careful planning and thoughtful preparation, we hope you are successful.

7 | Commitment & Conclusion

Demonstrate the importance of your employer’s support.

Finally, it’s time to seal the deal by describing what your employer’s support—both time and financial—means to you. First and foremost, you will want to demonstrate your commitment to the company in return for their support. For Executive MBA students, this takes on a variety of forms; some offer to stay with the company for a lock-in period and others come to an agreement about paying back their tuition funds should they leave. In discussions with your supervisors, leadership team, and human resources department, you should thoughtfully consider what long-term benefits you can offer to the company in return for their investment in you.

Secondly, it’s important to reiterate how seriously you take the opportunity to study for an MBA at Chicago Booth. As a school, Chicago Booth is known for having a rigorous curriculum, and it speaks volumes about your eagerness to learn that you want to attend. Demonstrate your passion to be challenged and commitment towards the hard work of obtaining an MBA.
8 | Supporting Documents

⚠ Append any documents that will strengthen your case with your employer.

Many students include an appendix with supporting materials. Choose these carefully, and only include items which you think will strengthen your case. Examples of appendix items are letters of recommendation from supervisors past and present, performance reviews, and examples of results you have created for the company.