DESCRIPTIVE CASE STUDY
The Lincoln Institute of Land Policy seeks to improve quality of life through the effective use, taxation, and stewardship of land. To advance the institute’s mission, we offer professional learning programs that puts current research and effective practices in land policy into the hands of public officials, business leaders, and citizens who will use them to solve social, economic, and environmental challenges facing their communities. Our teaching and learning strategy includes the creation of a case study library that is guided by learning design principles and leverages technology innovations. Educators and practitioners across the world will use Lincoln Institute cases in residential and online courses and workshops. These cases will also serve as exemplars for case authors who want to contribute to the library.

Definition of a Descriptive Case Study
• Uses a narrative framework that focuses on a real world problem and provides essential facts about it, including relevant background information.
• Introduces readers to key concepts, policies, and tools (including quantitative tools) relevant to the problem.
• Explains the actual solution, the process of implementing it, and the results.
• Offers analysis and evaluation of the chosen solution, its implementation, and the outcomes, including strengths and weaknesses, tradeoffs, and lessons learned.
• May offer alternative solutions to the problem.

General Information about the Case
This section is not part of the case itself. The information will help the Lincoln Institute describe the case to potential users and support users to find relevant cases in the digital case library.

• Topic and subtopics
• Timeframe
• Learning goals
• Primary audience
• Prerequisite knowledge
• Brief summary

Topic and Subtopics
Specify the topic and subtopics to help instructors and facilitators find relevant cases and make instructional decisions such as how the case fits into a discipline.

Timeframe
Specify the inclusive dates of the main events of the case.
Learning Goals
States the knowledge, skills, and expected outcomes of the case using active verbs (understand, apply, analyze, evaluate or create).

Primary Audience
Indicate the most appropriate audience for the case. Example: graduate urban planning students.

Prerequisite Knowledge
Specify what the primary audience needs to know to make best use of the case.

Brief Summary
In a few sentences describe the primary topic of the case and the major events it covers.

Guidelines for Research and Writing
A Descriptive Case narrative consists of the people involved in the situation, their thoughts and opinions, relevant background history, and qualitative and quantitative information about the situation.

Single and simple numbers can be stated in the case text. An array of numbers should be presented in a tabular or graphic format. For readers, graphic formats such as bar charts or graphs show relationships among numbers better than spreadsheets and tables. Cases can also include a variety of other graphic material such as photographs, maps, and diagrams. However, the author must have permission to use the material from whomever holds the publication rights to them.

The hardest decision case authors have to make is what information to include and exclude. The more information a case presents, the more difficult the reading task is and the harder it is for readers to identify, understand, and remember critical information. Experts tend to overestimate the amount of information an audience can absorb and retain. In general, audiences have a surprisingly limited ability to process information and retain it. This is not a justification for "dumbing down" content. The point is to be judicious in the selection of content to keep readers' attention on key points, ease the cognitive load on them, and help them remember what is important in the long term.

Longer cases are not better cases. Authors need to consider the tradeoffs related to audience – the level of students, the background knowledge they have, their motivation, and their ability to retain information. Case authors also need to be aware of the learning objectives of the case, the level of detail necessary for accuracy, and the risk of too much detail distracting readers.
Updates to a Case

A case writer should consider submitting a revised version under certain conditions. The most obvious is factual mistakes. In addition, authors often learn things that can improve the case after using it in the classroom or in workshops. For instance, an author may find that the presentation of certain information consistently confuses audiences and needs rewriting or there are gaps in information that need to be filled. There may also be times when additional information comes to light that needs to be worked into a case.
**TEMPLATE**

**Title of the Case**
The title should tell readers what the main subject of the case is. Interesting titles and subtitles can pique reader interest. Example: The Hudson Yards Infrastructure Project: Banking on the Future in Manhattan.

**Definition of the Problem**
Cases are stories. A Descriptive Case tells a story about people, events, and issues that increases readers' factual knowledge and their knowledge of a discipline such as urban planning.

The first section of the case should be relatively short. (By "section" we mean one or more paragraphs set off by headings in the text.) Remember that most readers will not be familiar with the subject of the case and a long and verbose first section will likely overload them with information. The overload can discourage them from reading further or cause them to start skimming.

The most flexible narrative framework for a Descriptive Case is problem – solution – implementation. A "problem" is not necessarily a negative construct. A better way to think about it is a combination of opportunities and challenges.

For example:

There are derelict properties in a city that the private owner cannot sell because no one is willing to take on the risk of redeveloping them (a challenge). The properties have potential economic value (an opportunity) but lack access to transportation and do not have adequate infrastructure (challenges). The city could unlock their value (an opportunity) but cannot afford to fund the effort out of its regular budget (a challenge). The city would benefit from the economic value of development and the lives of residents would improve (opportunities).

The first section of the case narrative should describe the major problem. The more clearly the problem is defined for readers, the better they will be able to understand everything that follows. The definition of a problem should take into account the audience's knowledge. Because a case author is usually an expert, she may underestimate what they need to know.

A problem often can be better understood when the author provides relevant background information. It should be given after the problem is defined. Sometimes, it can warrant a separate section.
Possible Strategies and Solutions
The next phase of the narrative is to introduce the possible strategies available to the main characters in the case for solving the problem. A complicated situation can have multiple solutions. If so, the case should describe those options, including any that were not considered but should have been.

Solution and Implementation
The case next describes the solution that was chosen and the reasons why the main characters chose it. The description should be factual, without evaluative comments. Because a solution is only as good as its implementation, the latter should be laid out.

Results
This part of the story details the results of the selected solution and implementation, including quantitative and qualitative outcomes. Again, the description should be factual and avoid judgment. Important results that were not known at the time the case was written should be acknowledged. This may be common in cases about land use projects because of their long timeframes. The discussion of results marks the end of the case narrative.

Analysis and Evaluation
The author is now in a position to take a step back from narrative and provide an overall evaluation of the success or failure of the solution. The writer should explain the positives and negatives of the outcomes. The explanation should focus on the most important evaluative conclusions. The more findings presented, the more difficulty readers will have in remembering the critical ones.

If they are not obvious, the causes of the important outcomes should be discussed. For example, the location of a housing development, the involvement of the local community, and the use of appropriate financial tools were the major factors behind the project's success.

The case writer should take into account any external or unanticipated factors that affected the outcomes positively or negatively. Example: a creative solution to public finance was undermined by unexpected developments in the national or international economy. Or it was facilitated by a strong reform effort that curtailed corruption and prevented the leakage of funds from the project.

Lessons Learned
In this final section, the writer explains the major lessons of the case. If the solution was successful, what were the primary success factors? Could the successful result have been even stronger? If it failed, what were the primary causes? Could any changes to the solution or implementation have made a difference? If the solution had mixed results, the writer should explain the primary positive and negative outcomes and their causes, noting any changes that could have strengthened the positives and lessened or prevented the negatives.

The section should also make clear which lessons are exclusively or primarily local and which
can be transferred to other localities. For example, safeguards against corruption built into a solution were critical to the success of a local project but would not be necessary in countries without significant levels of corruption.

**Teaching Support**

Case writers can help instructors and facilitators use their cases more effectively by sharing their knowledge about case content and organization. Descriptive Cases can be the subject of a lecture. They may have more value for learning, however, when used as a basis for discussion.

Please provide the following:

*Summary of the Case*

The summary should highlight the key events, outcomes, concepts, and evaluative points of the case.

*Teaching Plans and Questions*

The most straightforward teaching plan follows the order of the case. Case writers should provide a few questions for each section. Instructor-facilitators benefit from questions that are divided according to the content of the responses: facts, analysis, and judgment.

Case writers may suggest alternative plans for discussing the case in an order that is different from its organization. For example:

The background information may reveal that an opportunity was missed or a mistake was made in the past that had a profound effect on the subject of the case. The instructor might want to start with this and discuss how past events shaped future ones.

A discussion might start with the factual results of a project and move to a discussion of the causes. The instructor might then ask whether students or participants agree with the case writer's evaluation of the causes of the results.

Another fruitful category of questions is asking students or participants to connect their background knowledge to new concepts or tools in the case, to compare and contrast the situation in the case with others they are familiar with through cases or professional experience, and to consider how the case could help them in thinking about similar situations they might encounter in the future.