



How to gain your employer's support

INSEAD Executive MBA

The INSEAD EMBA is the perfect “next step” for experienced managers who have excelled in their careers so far. The benefits to you are clear. As an EMBA candidate, you are seeking to develop your leadership skills with a view to move to the next level.

Nevertheless, the EMBA also offers significant benefits to your organisation. During the programme, you will continue to work – which means **you will take new skills, knowledge and motivation back to the office after every module.**

This guide has been created to help you convince your boss, HR Director and/or CEO that undertaking the EMBA is the right move for both you and your organisation. Whatever your circumstances or ambitions, you will certainly need the support of your company to complete the programme. But you may also consider asking for sponsorship or other forms of assistance.

Remember, like all good investments, the EMBA offers significant returns.

Preparing to ask for support – your business case

Putting together a business case should help you prepare for all the questions you may face when asking your company for sponsorship. It is a way to plan your strategy and ensure you are well-equipped to address the concerns of key decision-makers in your organisation.

1. Know yourself

- **Ensure that your motivations are clear:** it is essential that you know your own reasons and objectives for embarking on such a rigorous and demanding programme as the EMBA. You will find a helpful self-assessment exercise on the INSEAD website at:
<http://global.emba.insead.edu/EMBA-development.php>
- **Define your own commitment:**
 - **Put forward a clear plan for managing your deadlines and fulfilling your commitments:** your managers' number one concern, when you tell them you are considering the EMBA, will be your regular absence from the business frontline. As you will need to reassure your boss, you should be extremely well prepared for this conversation.
 - **Be prepared to be flexible:** employers may require a variety of commitments from sponsored candidates: from lock-in periods post programme to agreements to refund tuition in the event you leave the organisation. This is your opportunity to reinforce your long-term commitment to your employer. Keep in mind that talent

retention is an important issue for HR managers. Your lock-in period is very likely to be an integral factor to the level of support you receive.

- **Carefully plan the support that you will require:** the next section outlines the different types of support that you may want to consider asking your employer for

2. Know your organisation

- **Do your research:** study company policy with regards to master's programmes. If you are approaching HR or a senior manager, it may be worthwhile including a reference or letter of support from your current line manager.
- **Outline the key benefits:** what will your organisation get out of sponsoring you for the INSEAD EMBA?
- **Network with others who have done similar programmes:** either in your own organisation or similar organisation from the same sector. They could have done an EMBA elsewhere, the INSEAD MBA or even executive education. Ask them what they gained from the experience, as well as how they gained funding and/or other support. You can contact us to find out if somebody from your company or sector has completed the EMBA and may be able to advise you. It is essential to have this information at your fingertips in order to adapt your negotiation position and set the right objectives.

3. Know the programme

During the conversation with your employer, specific questions regarding the programme content, structure and logistics may come up. You want to ensure you can answer all of their questions.

- **Check out our website:** the INSEAD EMBA website <http://global.emba.insead.edu/> has a great deal of information, but you will find out even more by attending one of our regional or on-campus events. Areas to consider are: length of programme, class profile, rankings, cost, programme content, alumni network, faculty and schedule.
- **Meet us:** for more personalised support, including an individual campus tour, get in touch using the contact details at the end of this guide. We always encourage candidates to reach out to us and ask questions about our EMBA programme.

Our team is committed to helping you through this sponsorship process. In the past, even our Dean of Degree Programmes has spoken directly with companies to explain the value that they can expect to gain from sponsoring their employees through the INSEAD EMBA. Just ask for our help!

What kind of support do you need?

Depending on your particular situation and organisation, you may consider asking for different types of support from your employer.

Essential: Time and commitment

Your company/manager's support in terms of time and commitment is crucial to your success in the programme, and that's why we ask that all participants obtain formal written commitment from their employer before they start the EMBA. Upon admission, you will receive the official documents that your firm will need to complete.

Offer your employer a full and realistic picture of the time investment, which depends on where you opt to do the initial core courses:

- **Asia Section:** 53 days out of the office over 17 months (more weekend sessions)
- **Europe Section:** 61 days out of the office over 14 months
- **Middle East Section:** 60 days out of the office over 15 months

All 3 options require a further 10 to 12 hours of study every week – probably during evenings and weekends. Remember also that, as the programme goes on, you are likely to study in Fontainebleau, Singapore and Abu Dhabi, depending on the choices you make – plus possible off-campus locations, depending on the options available.

All the module dates are fixed well in advance, so you will have ample time to plan around them. However, the timetable is intense and you will have very little time for calls and emails, while you are on campus for a module.

Time to do the programme may come in a variety of forms: unpaid leave; additional paid leave; holiday weeks “borrowed” in advance; a sabbatical year; parental leave; combining study with business trips... we see many creative solutions and combinations negotiated!

Highly desirable: Assistance with assignments

It is important that you highlight the many opportunities to apply all of your EMBA learning to your organisation's activities. You will be able to deliver practical and beneficial recommendations, informed by the latest business thinking of our world-leading faculty.

Specifically, there are two major opportunities to link your learning directly to your work: firstly through short “Implementation Essays” and secondly via a substantial Final Project. In both cases, your assignment can be customised to fit your company's strategic priorities. And your final conclusions can easily be turned into a report to share with your leadership team.

Of course, we understand that some issues are confidential as they may be sensitive business challenges that the company is facing. In such situations, we will sign a standard non-disclosure agreement (NDA). You can reassure your manager about our sensitivity to these matters.

Implementation Essays

During the EMBA, you will need to choose two core or elective courses on which to write short Implementation Essays. These assignments have one central purpose: to apply learning from coursework to practical issues that you face at work.

Using theory to improve practice

During the programme, you will come across many theoretical frameworks, models of cause and effect, formulae, prescribed processes – and more. It is important for your career development that you practise applying them yourself. Without good theoretical knowledge, you may find it difficult to interpret patterns in the business reality around you. Yet, too much reliance on a simplistic theory may also lead to inflexible or unimaginative responses.

The overarching goal of the essays is **to add value to your company** by:

- Thinking through how the knowledge gained can be applied to your organisational context
- Determining what special contingencies must be taken into account
- Better understanding of your organisation
- Suggesting improvements to your organisation

Typical examples of topics:

- Brand Management or new market entry for a product or service
- Organisational diagnosis of a recent performance problem or success
- Capital investment and allocation decisions in your division.

Final Project

The Final Project constitutes a significant part of your studies. It also provides a springboard for post-programme action. Your company may choose to get closely involved in your project and allocate other resources, such as senior management time, to support you. Even if not, your project should ideally be **designed to give something back to your company in return for its support** by:

- Tackling a genuine strategic issue within your company or wider industry
- Offering potential for real business impact within your company

- Integrating and applying your knowledge from several parts of the EMBA curriculum and the Leadership Development Programme
- Ideally preparing you for your next career move within the company, by helping you build contacts, assemble resources or gain buy-in

Typical examples of topics:

- A rigorous competitive analysis
 - How CSR can make business sense
 - Achieving post-merger/acquisition excellence
 - Retaining top talent in a competitive industry
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Nice to have: Financial backing

Gaining a place on the programme is an achievement in itself. But financing your INSEAD EMBA may be an even greater challenge. It is therefore important to consider your financing options as early as possible, whether through savings, loans, scholarships, sponsorship from your employer or – most likely – a combination of sources.

It is entirely at the discretion of your employer whether or not to support you financially. At INSEAD, we estimate that around 27% of our EMBA participants receive some level of financial support and typically only 19% of the class is fully sponsored.

When to approach your manager or HR department

Some candidates wait to be admitted to the EMBA before they start any conversations about support (especially financial), while others decide to inform their managers early in the process. There are no universal rules. However, we encourage you to start your research as early as possible.

Agreeing amounts and conditions of sponsorship

Keep in mind that any financial sponsorship will be directly linked to the estimated benefits that your company believes it will gain from your participation in the EMBA. As mentioned earlier, you might be asked to sign a retention agreement, which will oblige you to stay a number of years in the company in return for sponsorship... or to repay all or some of the amount. This is a relatively common course of action.

Another option to explore is some form of “retrospective” sponsorship, whereby the company pays a percentage of the total fees, as and when you deliver certain pre-arranged conditions. For example, if your workload and deadlines are not compromised after your attendance to the first 3 modules of the programme, your employer may reimburse you a pre-agreed amount.

The alternatives to company sponsorship

There are many options for financing your participation in the EMBA, including the following:

- **INSEAD scholarships:** INSEAD offers both merit- and need-based scholarships to offset tuition fees. These are awarded to candidates whose profiles best match our objective of promoting better international business practice. In the EMBA class of 2014, 27% of participants received an INSEAD scholarship covering 5% to 20% of tuition fees. Note that we require all scholarship applicants to provide accurate details about their financial situation. In the interest of fairness, those whose companies are paying 50% or more of their fees are not eligible to apply. See: <http://global.emba.insead.edu/emba-financing/>
- **Savings and loans:** In the 2014 class, 39% of participants financed their EMBA entirely through their own funds, including savings and loans. All admitted participants are eligible to apply for an International Loan Programme from Prodigy Finance, an innovative “community platform” set up by INSEAD alumni to help students at leading business schools gain access to education they could not otherwise afford. See: <https://prodigyfinance.com/>

We also encourage you to explore local and national options for loans and scholarships. We can provide you with information on other organisations and banks known by INSEAD to offer loans for the INSEAD EMBA programme. Some countries may also offer tax breaks and government loans.

The key benefits for your company

At its simplest, the EMBA will help you to do a better job in your current role and prepare you for new responsibilities. Here is a summary of the key points you should highlight to your organisation:

1. Through the Leadership Development Programme, you will be able to **make an impact on the work of your team** and get more out of those who work with you. Running throughout the length of the EMBA, you will be involved in a programme of group and individual coaching, 360 degree feedback, experimental teamwork training and more.
2. The curriculum allows you to **address specific challenges your company is facing** – the final project and implementation essays are also a direct return on investment for your company as you will be analysing an issue and providing recommendations with the help of an INSEAD professor.
3. **Access to expert advice and valuable business contacts** from around the world that will help you and your organisation grow and address business challenges through INSEAD's vast network of participants and alumni (50,000+ alumni worldwide).

4. INSEAD faculty are some of the most acclaimed business thinkers in the world. During the EMBA, you will **receive previews of cutting-edge business research, giving your company the chance to prepare for future challenges** – ahead of the competition.
5. The EMBA comes in a choice of three convenient formats, depending on your starting campus. This enables you to **minimise time away and maximise your impact**.
6. INSEAD's multicultural, multidisciplinary classes will give you **new problem-solving perspectives, as well as the international insights and multicultural outlook** you need to excel in today's globalised business environment.
7. As you come back to the office after each module, you will inevitably **cascade many of the benefits and the learning you are gaining from the programme to others in your organisation**. As you interact with others in your company and explain your new perspectives and newly acquired business models, they too will be learning.

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 organisation who have done comparable programmes?
- Have I decided on the best time to make my first approach to the key stakeholders?
- Am I able to explain how the programme addresses specific needs in the company?
- Can I explain how the programme addresses my career development within the organisation?
- Am I clear about the benefits that this programme will bring to my employer?
- Do I know exactly what kinds of support I'm going to ask for?
- 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

In Europe

Marie-Laurence Lemaire – Tel : +33 (0)160 72 4402
Email : marie-laurence.lemaire@insead.edu

Pierrette Doz-Perdrix – Tel : +33 (0)160 72 4454
Email : pierrette.doz-perdrix@insead.edu

In Asia and the Americas

Neesha Rai – Tel : +65 9028 0273
Email : neesha.rai@insead.edu

Anthony Widjaja – Tel : +65 8201 5487
Email : anthony.widjaja@insead.edu

In the Middle East

Laith Dajani – Tel : +971 2651 5279
Email : laith.dajani@insead.edu

emba.info@insead.edu

www.insead.edu