

Guidelines for a Letter of Intent

(A LOI is also known as a Letter of Inquiry or a concept paper.)

- **Background:** Your first contact with a foundation should be extensively studying the foundations website, reviewing the foundation's missions and goals, an annual report, giving guidelines, and grants list. If you have unanswered questions contact the CFR who may contact the foundation on your behalf.
- If, after carefully reviewing this material, you determine that this foundation is an appropriate match for you, your next contact will be a Letter of Inquiry, which is a brief summary of your project.
- **Important:** A Letter of Inquiry is not a vague exploration of an idea. It is assumed that you have already thought through your proposed project (including a budget!) and are just presenting an abbreviated description.

A Letter of Inquiry allows the foundation to quickly assess if there is a good match between the foundation's interests and the project. If it appears to be a good match, they will request a full proposal. When you see the words, "proposals not accepted," it usually means you must first submit a letter of inquiry.

Technique

The LOI must be concise yet engaging. Use your words smartly. Avoid jargon, adjectives, flowery subjective statements that are not supported by facts. Write a logical, persuasive argument emphasizing how this project can help solve a significant problem or void in the knowledge base.

Please review the [Basic Components of a Proposal](#) because a Letter of Inquiry is a condensed version of a proposal. Include the highlights of that information. For example, an executive summary will be a full page of your proposal, but in a LOI it will only be one paragraph. Letters of Intent are generally 2–3 pages. If the foundation indicates a page limit, do not exceed it!

Components of a LOI

Unless otherwise indicated by the foundation, the contents will generally follow this format:

1. Opening Paragraph: Your summary statement.

- It should be able to stand alone. If the reviewer reads nothing else they should know what you want to do from reading this paragraph. Make it clear what you want the reader to do; for example, consider funding the project.
- Answer the following: Who wants to do what? How much is being requested? Is this a portion of a larger project cost? Over what period of time is money being requested?
- Example:

"The School of Nursing at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst (UMass) seeks support for developing an innovative undergraduate and graduate curriculum in psychiatric mental health nursing that will prepare expert nurse clinicians in the delivery of mental health services to at-risk adolescents in the community setting. We are requesting \$87,000 over a two-year period."

[FYI: *This proposal got funded!*]

- You also may want to say if you are responding to an RFP (Request for Proposals) or make the connection between the foundation's interest and your project.
- Keep this paragraph short! This seems like a lot to address, but you will have room later to explain your rationale for the project, your methodology, and to establish your credibility.

2. Statement of Need: The "why" of the project. (1–2 paragraphs)

- Explain what issue you are addressing.
- Explain why you have chosen to respond to this set of issues in the way that you have.
- State briefly why this matters in the area in which you will be working.
- Note who benefits. Make sure you can indicate the public good achieved.

3. Project Activity: The "what" and "how" of the project. (The bulk of your letter)

- Give an overview of the activities involved. Give details to the degree that space allows.
- Highlight why your approach is novel and deserving of the special attention that funding connotes.
- Indicate if there will be collaboration with other organizations and what their roles will be. Be specific about who does what.

4. Outcomes (1–2 paragraphs; before or after the Project Activity)

- State the specific outcomes you hope to achieve.
- Indicate how evaluation is part of the project. How will you know you've achieved these outcomes?

5. Credentials (1–2 paragraphs)

- Demonstrate why your institution or your staff is best equipped to carry out this activity.
- Put any historic background about the institution here.
- Brag with substance. Indicate awards, rankings, and tangible measures that set you apart from your peers.

6. Budget (1–2 paragraphs)

- General description of the projects funding needs and total amount of request.

7. Closing (1 paragraph)

- Offer to give any additional information the foundation might need. Include a contact name and contact information.
- Express appreciation for the reader's attention, or for the opportunity to submit if it is in response to a Request for Proposals (RFP).
- Specifically indicate you are interested in discussing the project and will "contact their office" by a certain date (allowing time for them to receive and read the letter).

8. Signature

- Contact CFR to determine who would be the best person to sign the LOI.