

## **Rutgers Corporate & Foundation Relations Developing a Concept Paper**

There are many suitable ways to approach a corporate or foundation funder to gauge interest in a particular project. Technology—particularly email correspondence and the Internet—has made it possible to engage in more rapid and sometimes informal communications with funders than ever before. Funders will often access a program’s website to gain critical information about a potential applicant. While phone conversations or a face-to-face meeting remain the ideal choices for communicating with funders, a potential donor may ask faculty or staff to submit a brief concept paper before agreeing to a meeting or phone discussion.

A concept paper serves in much the same way as a letter of inquiry—as a preliminary way to share information about a program to entice a funder to explore the opportunity further. The concept paper engages the funder in the general ideas and outcomes without providing the specifics usually found in a letter of inquiry or full proposal. It is critical that the concept paper be concise, one or two pages at most.

The RUF Corporate and Foundation Relations staff is well-positioned and most willing to review a draft of your concept paper, provide editing suggestions, and discuss potential funding strategies for your project.

Following are the critical elements to include in a concept paper:

**Title** Your title should be easy to understand and accurately reflect what you are attempting to do.

**Introduction** This section provides an overview for your ideas. It is typically one paragraph (three or four sentences) and summarizes the key points of your program. It should include a sentence stating what support you are seeking and why, and another that identifies the main purpose of the project. The introduction should be very compelling—clear and to the point. Do not use abbreviations or jargon.

**Rationale** Briefly describe the problem you seek to address, the constituents you hope to serve, and the importance of the issue. Do not assume that the reader understands the situation. Provide enough detail to substantiate your claims, including statistical or comparative data, and qualitative information.

Discuss other efforts to solve the problem and how your project will fill a gap in services or knowledge. If you are proposing a national project, use evidence that supports a national emphasis. If your project is local or regional, you might discuss both the national and local trends and data. In making your case, begin with broad ideas and then bring it home with a rationale that addresses your targeted area specifically.

<b>Organization</b>	Include a brief paragraph that describes your organization’s capabilities, the expertise of individuals involved in the project, and the institutional capacity to achieve the stated goals.
<b>Project Description</b>	Briefly describe what you propose to do. Focus on goals versus specific objectives. Include statements that address innovation or uniqueness in your approach. Describe the compelling reasons to fund this work at this time. Give time frames for implementation and describe any agencies that will be partners in your idea. You should also include a brief statement on how you will evaluate the program to determine that it has met its objectives.
<b>Budget</b>	A concept paper does not typically need a full budget. Include a general statement that gives the total expected expenditure, and the main use of the funds. For example, “The total cost of the XYZ program is projected to be \$100,000, which will cover funds for two conferences, development of marketing materials, and salary for the program coordinator.”
<b>Summary</b>	It is best to begin the concept paper with the project description and end with a summary statement that reiterates the importance of the project and its impact. You may also wish to relate your proposed program to the stated interests of the foundation. State who will follow up and ask for a phone conversation and/or face to face meeting to include the appropriate campus leadership or project director. If you are emailing this concept paper, include relevant links to your organization.

If you have questions about this or other materials you are drafting to potential corporate and foundation funders, please contact a member of the CFR staff at 848-932-8208 or consult the staff directory at <http://support.rutgers.edu/s/896/Foundation/Giveindex.aspx?sid=896&gid=1&pgid=1974>