

Rutgers University Foundation Corporate and Foundation Relations

What is A Letter of Inquiry and When Do I Use It?

A **Letter of Inquiry** (LOI) is an opportunity to introduce your proposed project to a funder and to elicit feedback that hopefully leads to an invitation to submit a full proposal. A letter of inquiry is not a vague exploration of an idea. It should be well-conceived, and include a budget, although in an abbreviated form.

Before submitting a Letter of Inquiry, it makes sense to have some initial interaction with the prospective funder, either directly or in concert with a director of development or a Corporate and Foundation Relations director. Other interactions could include sending a concept paper, conducting a phone conversation or a meeting, or engaging in an email exchange to determine the level of interest a funder has in your project. The CFR staff can help determine a strategy and make these initial approaches.

Technique

The Letter of Inquiry should be brief, but convincing. Use your words smartly. Avoid jargon or flowery subjective statements that you cannot support with facts. Write as if you are making a logical, persuasive argument based on need and capacity to meet that need. When you have finished drafting your letter, ask yourself:

- Are there any weak points?
- Have I made a good case for support?
- Have I described why this problem is important?
- Does my project have the potential for significantly impacting the issue being addressed?
- Have I shown my organization's knowledge and understanding of the issue and competence to address this area?

The most compelling case for support directly relates your project to the funder's interests and perspective. Know what your potential funder is passionate about. Look at the funder's website, research the funder's interests and past interactions with your organization, review the organization's 990s. Address these interests in your Statement of Need and you will compel them to read on.

Contents of an LOI

A Letter of Inquiry is a condensed version of a full proposal, usually two to three pages in length. If a corporation or foundation specifies the format and length of an LOI, follow those directions and **do not** exceed the page limit.

Unless otherwise indicated, the following format is an effective way to organize an LOI.

Opening Paragraph

- This serves as your summary statement. It should be able to stand alone. If the reviewer reads nothing else, he or she should understand your proposal idea from reading this paragraph. Make it clear.
- The Opening Paragraph should answer the following questions:
 - Who wants to do what?
 - How much are you requesting and over what period?
 - Is this a portion of a larger project cost?
- Example: “The School of Nursing at Rutgers University-Newark 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. The School of Nursing requests \$87,000 over a two-year period.”
- The Opening Paragraph may indicate if the LOI is a response to an RFP or may make the connection between the foundation’s interest and your project.
- Keep this paragraph short. You will have time later for explaining your rationale, your methodology, and for establishing your credibility.

Statement of Need (1-2 paragraphs)

- This section answers the “why” of the project.
- Explain what issue you are addressing.
- Articulate why you are responding to the issue(s) in the way that you have.
- State briefly the importance of this project in the field in which you will be working.
- Note who benefits. Make sure you can indicate the public good that can be achieved.

Project Activity (The bulk of the document)

- This section answers the “what” and “how” of the project.
- Give a general overview of the activities involved. Give more detailed information to the degree that space allows.
- Highlight why your approach is novel and merits special attention.
- Indicate any collaborations with other organizations and what their roles will be. Be specific about who does what.

Anticipated Outcomes (1-2 paragraphs)

- State the specific outcomes you plan to achieve.
- Indicate how evaluation is part of the project – how will you know you have achieved these outcomes.

Credentials (1-2 paragraphs)

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

Budget (1-2 paragraphs)

- State the total project cost and the amount requested from the corporation or foundation. Indicate broad categories of activities to be funded.

- Include other sources of funding, both cash and in-kind. Especially indicate what the university or school will contribute. Do not overlook the value of all in-kind contributions, including those of collaborators.

Closing (1 paragraph)

- Offer to provide any additional needed information.
- Give a contact name and contact information for follow-up. Indicate if one person is the administrative contact and another is the program contact.
- Express appreciation for the reader's attention and/or the opportunity to submit if it is in response to a RFP
- Ask to submit a full proposal

Signature

- Generally it is best to have the highest ranking person available sign the letter. This indicates institutional support.

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 [CFR Staff Directory](#)