

Letter of Inquiry Guidance

Foundations and corporations give away large sums of money each year. Most of them ask for initial contacts in the form of a one or two page letter of inquiry. The following is one way to structure a letter of inquiry.

1. Who we are and what we need
2. What we want from the foundation or corporation
3. Summary of our plan of action
4. What we will contribute to this project
5. The benefits which will accrue to us, our constituents, and whomever the foundation is interested in helping

Keep your letter to two pages, maximum. Make sure it is clear and easily understood and that the person reading your letter can tell how and to whom to respond. Don't exaggerate or deceive, but try to make your opening need statement as dramatic as possible--you have to get the reader's attention. If the foundation or corporation is interested, they will ask you to submit a more complete proposal. In a complete proposal, follow whatever directions they give you exactly. Sometimes those directions are a way of testing how capable you are.

Many governmental agencies request a concept paper or pre-proposal before you submit a full proposal. This outline will work for a concept paper as well. Writing a concept paper is a good way to begin the proposal-writing process. It encourages you to focus on your topic, make some preliminary decisions about your project, and begin to put your budget together. A concept paper is also a good vehicle for initiating collaborations with colleagues and gaining preliminary approval of administrators.