
30 September 2016

Dear Friends,

We hope that this month's edition of the Newsflash finds you well! Here at Firelight we are getting into our reporting season- a great time to think about the work we have done, the steps in a grant-making cycle, and to reflect on what we have done well, how we can improve, and how we present ourselves to our funders and the community at large.

One of the first ways that an organization presents itself to funders and the community is through its letter of interest. Many foundations accept or request letters of interest prior to inviting grantees to apply for funding. Here at Firelight, for example, though we are not currently accepting new proposals, we receive letters of interest from many organizations- some of whom may be great potential partners in the future. Even if we cannot fund the letters of interest we receive at the moment, it is always interesting to read letters of interest from these organizations, to hear about their work, their plans, and their challenges.

This brings us to the topic of this edition of the Newsflash- how to write a great letter of interest. As an organization, your letter of interest is your first impression to a potential funder and potential connections. In this edition of the Newsflash, you'll find tips on writing a great letter of interest, some samples of appropriate letters of interest, and links to potential resources- a great chance to use all these tips about writing great letters of interest!

We hope you'll enjoy this Newsflash!

Warmly,
The Firelight Team

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A Guide to Seeking Funding from Foundations (Excerpt)

Writing a Good Letter of Intent:

The following information is advice on writing a good Letter of Inquiry (LOI) for foundations that was taken from Martin Teitel, foundation veteran (four decades in the

funding and nonprofit community) and author of the book Thank You for Submitting Your Proposal.

Many foundations prefer or even require grant-seeking nonprofits to submit an LOI, or Letter of Inquiry, before sending a complete proposal. The LOI allows the foundation to quickly screen potential candidates for funding, making sure that they do not waste time on ill-conceived ideas or those that do not fit with the foundation's mission. For you, the LOI is a way to get an invitation from the foundation to submit a complete proposal. Your goal is to get a call from staff at the foundation, asking for more.

- If the foundation has published guidelines for an LOI, follow them exactly. These might be called suggestions or guidelines rather than rules. In any case, follow them precisely. Not doing so ensures that your LOI will not get very far in the foundation's screening process.

- Type "Letter of Inquiry" at the top of your letter. LOIs receive a very quick initial screening to weed out irrelevant mail. It is helpful if you make it plain that you are submitting an LOI right from the beginning.

- A typical LOI is no more than three pages long, plus a budget, and includes the following:

- A brief and "catchy" title. The title should catch the attention of the reader and draw him or her into continuing.

- A one or two sentence summary of your project. Make it concise, compelling, and clear. The summary should: Answer the question, "What are we doing?"

Teitel suggests that you get a few people together and ask this question, and see what you come up with. Pay your utmost attention. Put the most effort into writing the first sentence of the summary. Write and rewrite it. Strike a tone suitable to the foundation's interests.

Learn from, but don't copy professional marketers. Use interesting, even riveting prose, but don't write as though you are selling soap. Even though you want the foundation to "buy" your idea, your ultimate goal is a partnership with the foundation to address a need. Do not use buzzwords that make unrealistic claims or general, unverifiable, statements. Don't use "unique," "cutting edge," or "raises awareness."

Don't use flowery adjectives and vague generalities. Include facts, concrete verbs, and sentences that show action. Emulate good journalistic writing. Don't manipulate, exhort or lecture the reader. An explanation of the issue you are addressing and how you will do it. A description of your organization. A budget. This may or may not be required. Refer to the foundation's instructions.

Make the LOI short and succinct. Although the LOI is a mini-proposal, do not just chop down your proposal to fit on three pages. The LOI should capture the essence of your proposal briefly but powerfully. Do not just cut and paste from a proposal, nor let your enthusiasm for your cause result in pages and pages of information.

Your LOI can make or break your relationship with a foundation. It will only get you in the door, but that is the most important step of all.

Source: <http://bit.ly/2dbdngH>

Getting that Grant: How to write letters that interest potential donors

More and more, foundations are asking for LOIs from nonprofits as a way of deciding more quickly if their funding focus and your organisation are a good match. Letters of interest/introduction are typically one to two pages in length, in contrast to a full proposal that can easily average five to 10 pages. Imagine the influx of requests foundations must receive and you can surely appreciate them wanting to pare down the process.

As the term LOI states, your submission should express your organisation's interest in partnering with a particular foundation and, or, serve as an introduction to a potential funder. Your goal is to be invited to tell funders more about your organisation through a full proposal. All you have to do is deliver a winning LOI that does two things:

1. Explains the basic highlights of your project and organisation.
2. Gets the funder excited about the possibility of partnering with you to have a real impact on a particular problem.

The grant writer's challenge is that 'all' of this can be tough to put together. You have to cram a lot of information into only a few pages and shorter is not always easier. And so it begins...

The first rule is always this: a funder's stated guidelines (inclusive of responding to specific questions, page limits, font size, etc.) always trump any format you may come up with on your own.

But, if you are given an open format, while there are no hard and fast rules, there are certain elements that are generally included in an LOI.

What to write

Tell the funder in just a sentence or two what you are working to accomplish.

Think of LOIs like mini-grants. You need all the elements of a full proposal, but with more brevity.

-Need

This includes human need, animal need, environmental need, etc that your organisation is working to improve. In describing your need, don't make your letter (or your full proposal for that matter) strictly about your charity. A charity is simply an office with very well-meaning people working there. While this is all well and good, the reason you are there is what you want to emphasise. What is the problem in the world, country, city, school, neighbourhood (you get the idea) that you are working to have an impact on? When possible include data from the city, state, community, etc to back up your

assertions.

-Our charity's response to that need

Describe what your organisation is doing to address the stated need.

What are the components of the project? How will you achieve your goals? Be specific in your description. For example, don't just write, 'we run a mental health programme to help children in need', instead write, 'we provide a free eight-week counselling programme for children aged seven to 10 who are experiencing violence'.

Add other pertinent details about your work here too. Where is the programme held? Is it ongoing or time limited? Talk about past accomplishments, successes and other factors that highlight your ability to successfully meet your goals.

-Target population

Who will you help and why? What gender are they? What age? Do they live in a specific region? Do they all share a common challenge or problem? What income bracket are they from? How many people will your programme serve? Also, add any other detail that will make clear who you are working to help. Maybe it's inner city kids, maybe it's elderly women, or maybe it's anyone with 'x' challenge or 'z' issue. No matter who they are or where they come from, the point is to simply make clear who or what your efforts are designed to help.

-The mission of your organisation

If you don't have a formal mission, in just a sentence or two tell the funder what you are working to accomplish.

-A brief history of your organisation

Let the foundation know a little about your organisation's background. How long has it been around? What geographic area do you serve? How did your organisation get its start? Why do you exist? What services do you provide? How many people, animals, etc do you serve? Why are you the right organisation to get the job done and earn the support of the foundation?

-Outcomes

Foundations want to know that their donation will indeed have an impact. Show them that it does by letting them know the result of their donation to your programme. How will you measure success of your project? Do you use surveys or evaluations? Do participants achieve a certain life target (for example, gaining employment, learning to read, finding good homes for dogs and cats, etc)? Is there a tangible item you will purchase (e.g. computers for children)?

-Funding needs

Let the foundation know how much you need for the full project and how much you are requesting from them. If you have other funds committed to the project also list them here.

A brief budget can also be included. This only needs be a few items for salaries and

wages, rent, or tangible items (e.g. computers to be used by children in your programme), or any other expense important to the project. As in a full proposal, the LOI should be a mix of emotion, accomplishment and demonstration of your organisation's ability to successfully meet its goals. Be professional, but show your human side too. Personal stories work well – even in short form. And, by all means, do thank funders for their time in reviewing your request.

If you learn to master the LOI, you will take a nice step forward in your grant writing and have a solid submission to send out to potential funders. Good luck fellow grant writers.

Source: Charlene Rocha, <http://bit.ly/2cJLGXI>

How to write a LOI: Grant Watch

Many foundations ask for a LOI before requesting a full grant proposal. This helps the funder to weed out organizations which are the most appropriate to receive their offered grant. Organizations also use the LOI to assess how many staff are needed in order to review the upcoming proposals. More so, the LOI places you on their mailing list for all future addendums and modifications for that particular grant, including deadline changes. LOI is a non-legally binding document which includes an introduction to your project, contact information at your agency, a description of your organization, a statement of need, your methodology and/or an achievable solution to the need, a brief discussion of other funding sources and a final summary.

Although foundations usually provide an outline for the LOI, we hope that the following tips will help you successfully win your applied for grants.

1. The LOI should be a brief, one page, informative letter which summarizes your ultimate full proposal. There are times, however, when it can be as long as three pages.
2. The structure of the LOI is a business letter. Therefore, write the LOI on business letterhead. Be sure that your company's address appears on the letterhead or add it to the letter on the right hand side. The recipient's address should appear on the left hand side of the paper.
3. It is important to use the specific name of the recipient. It is best to avoid general terminology such as, "Dear Sir" or "To Whom It May Concern".
4. The opening of your LOI might be the most important part of your letter. It should be a concise, executive summary which provides enticing information to inspire the reader to continue. Include the name of your organization, the grant you are applying for and/or the amount of money you are requesting as well as a short description of the project involved. You should also include how your project fits the funder's guidelines and funding interests.
5. Next, give a brief history of your nonprofit and its programs. There should be a direct connection made from what you currently do to what you want to accomplish with their funding. Include a description of your target population and geographic area. It is wise to incorporate statistical facts about what you are doing and hope

- to do as well as specific examples of successes and needs.
6. Elaborate on your objectives. How do you plan on using the funding to solve the problem? Describe the project succinctly. Include major activities along with the names and titles of key project staff.
 7. If you are requesting funding from other sources, mention this in a brief paragraph. In addition, include any funding already secured as well as how you plan to support the project in the future.
 8. Briefly summarize your goal. Note that you are open to answering any further questions. Thank the funder for his consideration in your organization.
 9. You may attach any additional forms which are helpful to present your information. However, keep in mind that this is a LOI and not a full proposal.
 10. Review the given guidelines for the LOI to assure that you have met all of the funder's requirements. Failing to include all requested information can cause your LOI to be disregarded.
 11. When signing the LOI, use proper business salutations such as "sincerely" or "respectfully". It is best to avoid an overly friendly closing.

Source: Grant Watch, <http://bit.ly/1RRpRVs>

Sample Letter of Intent for a Grant

A letter of intent for a grant, also known as a letter of inquiry, is a brief outline of an organization's request for funding. Many foundations require a letter of intent before asking for a full fundraising proposal. Although the letter should be brief, it may be as long as three pages. The letter should also be written on the organization's letterhead. The main body of the document should include an introduction, a description of the organization applying for the grant, a statement of need, an achievable solution to the need, a very brief discussion of other funding resources, and a final conclusion. The letter of intent should also include information on when the organization plans to apply for the grant.

Jane Doe, Director
ABC Foundation
123 Number Lane
Newport, Virginia 00000

November 20, 2010

Dear Ms. Doe:

The XYZ Foundation seeks support of \$20,000 from the ABC Foundation for general support of our Helping Hands project. We think this project touts ABC Foundation's values of helping lower-income children to succeed.

Our organization, established in 1980, in Newport, Virginia serves the lower-income community by furnishing books and literature, tutors, and an after-school club.

The Helping Hands project for which we are requesting funds will make a difference in the lives of these children by providing computers for them to complete their homework and to refurbish the playground area. We plan for the expansion of the playground to be complete within one year and for the computers to be accessible within 3 months of receiving funds.

We have received volunteer support from the community as well as fundraising support from the city of Newport, Virginia.

We invite you to come visit our foundation and we will call within two weeks to arrange the visit. We will be more than happy to submit a full proposal for your review.

Sincerely,
Susan Smith

Source: Sophisticated Edge, <http://bit.ly/2cYfEZd>

Opportunity: Segal Family Foundation

Segal Family Foundation is currently seeking applications to support organizations cultivating healthy, productive, and empathetic youth. Segal Family Foundation grants its philanthropic focus to Sub Saharan Africa and community-based organizations that have the localized knowledge needed to create sustainable change in their communities. The foundation supports African-led, grassroots non-governmental organizations building healthy, productive and empathetic youth.

Funding Information

- Have an annual budget ranging between \$50,000-\$500,000.
- Organizations with a budget over \$1 million may apply by invitation only.
- Foundation determines a grant's size based on the context of the organization. First-time grants typically range from \$10,000-\$40,000.
- Most grant commitments last 12 months. Grants are capped at \$100,000 a year per partner.

For more information, please visit: <http://bit.ly/2dhaI5H>

Opportunity Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa Deadline: Ongoing

The Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA) accepts grant applications from

organizations, groups, associations, institutions working for the overall development of southern African people, throughout the year. The groups, networks, or organizations and institutions whose mission and programs align with that of OSISA can make grant proposals below \$50,000 to support their projects or organizations. Their areas of focus are human rights, access to justice and the rule of law, democracy and governance, social and economic justice, natural resources governance, youth art and culture, and women's rights.

Eligibility Criteria

OSISA invites proposals from civil society, community or state actors from Southern Africa which are not formally registered entities. OSISA will consider concept proposals from such unregistered and informal groups and formations that, if approved, may then be further developed into fully-fledged grant proposals for consideration. Non-registered groups and formations may submit OSISA 2016 Concept Proposal Forms for consideration by OSISA.

For more information, visit: <http://bit.ly/2cXTrw3>

As part of the Firelight Foundation's Capacity Building Program, Firelight provides "Newsflashes" to share relevant resources and information with our active grantee-partners via weekly emails and via post on a monthly basis. We hope that by facilitating access to information for grassroots, community-focused organizations, programming for children and families, as well as organizational development, is enhanced. Past editions of the Firelight Newsflash can be found on our website:

<http://www.firelightfoundation.org/resources/newsflash>

We welcome your comments, feedback and ideas for upcoming Newsflashes at newsletter@firelightfoundation.org

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