

WRITING A REQUEST OR LETTER OF INQUIRY TO A PRIVATE FOUNDATION OR CORPORATION

Determining an Approach: The websites of most philanthropical foundations and corporations include information about the organization's giving interests and about how to apply for funding. When a foundation provides application guidelines, you should follow the requested format exactly. Some organizations provide you with an online form while others may simply ask that you send a letter of request or letter of inquiry (see below).

Please be aware:

- Foundations may not be approached (including email or phone contact) without prior approval from the Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP).
- All proposals, letters of request, letters of inquiry and online applications must be submitted by OSP and turned in to an OSP program officer at least 5 business days before the deadline.

Writing a Foundation/Corporate Request: When no online application or specific format for a proposal is indicated, a *letter of request* is suggested. The letter should be no longer than two pages in length (except in very unusual circumstances). The following guidelines are designed to help you prepare a solicitation letter.

Paragraph 1: Introduce the need and impact of the problem to be addressed in a convincing and compelling way. Do not sensationalize or overstate the problem.

Paragraph 2: Briefly introduce the solution to the problem, the goal of the project, anticipated outcomes, and request a specific amount of money from the organization to help fund the solution. For a corporation, indicate the incentive for their organization to give. Indicate whether you will be soliciting other organizations or whether this is the only organization from whom you are requesting funding, and if so, why. Indicate whether this is a one-time request or a request for ongoing funding.

Paragraph 3: Describe the problem in further detail. Provide brief statistics or supportive data. Explain the impacts of the problem and why it matters to people.

Paragraph 4: Describe the project objectives and related activities needed to implement the objective(s). Identify the planned **outputs** (website, brochures, classes, research, programs, services, etc.) and the anticipated **outcomes** (changes in attitude or behavior, improved self-worth, increased respect for self and others, discipline, literacy, individual and societal benefits, etc.) in measurable terms. Provide timelines for accomplishing activities and/or benchmarks for achieving outcomes.

Paragraph 5: Describe the organization requesting funding. Describe any resources already committed to the proposed project or that will be committed to the project by the organization requesting the funding. Identify the key personnel who will be responsible to implement the project, their qualifications, their knowledge and experience in the field, their experience in handling grant funds, and their commitment to assuring that the funds are used only for the purpose described in the proposal.

Paragraph 6: Identify how outcomes will be measured or how the project will be evaluated. Indicate what quality assurance activities will be conducted and what reports will be

submitted (if any). Indicate how you (and they) will know if the program is successful.

Paragraph 7: Identify or restate the impact (short and long-term outcomes) that this proposal will have if it is funded. Indicate any appropriate recognition that may be given to the organization (if appropriate). Invite an organization representative(s) to visit the program or project and meet with the program director and/or staff (if appropriate). Indicate when funding is required (if necessary) and assure the funding organization that any amount of funding toward the project would be appreciated. Express appreciation for reviewing and considering your proposal.

Additional pages: You may need to include a separate 1-page budget sheet with an itemized budget for the project. You will usually be required to include a copy of the IRS 501 (c)(3) letter.

Letters of Inquiry: If a foundation or corporation requests a letter of inquiry, they are looking for a one-page letter that *succinctly* describes your organization and its objectives, your proposed program and its benefits, and requests the opportunity to submit a full proposal if they are interested in your project. Often foundations state that they will not accept unsolicited proposals. However, some will accept letters of inquiry, which, if they pique the interest of the reader may result in an opportunity to submit a solicited proposal. The following is a suggested format for a letter of inquiry. This letter should be brief and only one page (it should be on the letterhead of the organization, have the current date, address, salutation, body, and closure all on one page, with one-inch margins and in 12-point type.) Letters of inquiry generally do **not** include a budget.

Paragraph 1: Introduce the need and impact of the problem to be addressed in a convincing and compelling way. Do not sensationalize or overstate the problem.

Paragraph 2: Briefly introduce the solution to the problem, the goal of the project, and anticipated outcomes. For a corporation, indicate the incentive for their organization to give. Identify the total amount of money needed to complete the project and that you will be requesting them to either fund the entire project or participate in funding the project (usually preferred).

Paragraph 3: Briefly describe the organization requesting funding and any resources already committed to the proposed project or that will be committed to the project by the organization requesting the funding.

Paragraph 4: Request that the organization allow you to submit a proposal to help fund this program or project. Express appreciation for their reviewing and considering your request.

Writing Tips: Most people write a request for funding by stating everything they can about their program and how great it is and why they need money. Few writers consider the request from the giver's perspective – Why is the giver giving? What does she or he hope to achieve? Are the goals of the proposed program consistent with those of the giving foundation? Consider it this way: what does the reader want to know rather than what does the writer want to say. Along the same vein, you need to anticipate the reader's questions and provide the information necessary for the reader to decide to fund the project. **Remember: Most foundations have giving priorities, write your proposal with their priorities in mind. Align your outcomes to match their mission.**