How to Write a Letter of Intent

Sometimes the scale of the project might suggest a small-scale letter format proposal, or the type of request might not require all of the proposal component or components in the same sequence as recommended here. The guidelines and policies of individual funders will be your ultimate guide. Many funders today state that they prefer a brief letter proposal; other require that you complete an application form. In any case, you will want to refer to the basic proposal components as provided here to be sure that you have not omitted any element that will support your case. As noted, the scale of the project will often determine whether it requires a letter or a longer proposal.

What are the elements of a letter request? For the most part, they should follow the format of a full proposal, except with regard to length. He letter should be no more than three pages, unless otherwise specified. You will need to call upon your writing skills because it can be very hard to get all the necessary details into a concise, well-articulated letter.

Components of a Good LOI

- **Follow the guidelines**: Sometimes a funder may ask only for a one or two page letter of intent. Be sure to know what they are looking for, so you can have a strong initial approach to the funder
- **Ask for the gift**: The letter should begin with a reference to your prior contact with the funder, if any. State why you are writing and how much funding is requested from the particular foundation
- **Describe the need**: In a very abbreviated manner, tell the funder why there is a need for this project
- **Explain what you will do**: Just as you would in a fuller proposal, provide enough detail to pique the funder’s interest. Describe precisely what would take place as a result of your grant
- **Provide organizational data**: Help the funder know more about your organization by including the mission statement, description of services offered, number of people served, staff, etc.
- **Include appropriate budget data**: Decide if this information should be incorporated into the letter or in a separate attachment. Be sure to indicate the total cost in the letter. Discuss future funding only if the absence of this information will raise questions
- **Close**: As with a longer proposal, a letter proposal needs to have a strong concluding statement
- **Attach any additional information required**: The funder may need much of the same information to back up a small request as a large one: a copy of your IRS tax determination letter, financial documentation, and brief resumes of key staff

It may take as much thought and data gathering to write a good letter request as it does to prepare a full proposal, and sometimes even more. Don’t assume that just because this is only a letter, it isn’t a time consuming and challenging task. Every document you put in front of a funder says something about you. Each step you take with a funder should build a relationship for the future.