What should be included in a letter of inquiry/intent?

In recent years, letters of inquiry have become an important part of the fundraising process. Many foundations now prefer that funding requests be submitted first in letter format instead of a full proposal. Others are using preliminary letters of inquiry to determine if they have an interest in a project before accepting a full proposal. In either instance, it is important to recognize that a well-written letter of inquiry is crucial to securing funding for your project. An effective letter of inquiry is often more difficult to write than a full proposal. The letter of inquiry should be brief—no more than three pages—and must be a succinct but thorough presentation of the need or problem you have identified, the proposed solution, and your organization’s qualifications for implementing that solution. The letter of inquiry should be addressed to the appropriate contact person at a foundation or to its CEO and should be sent by regular mail.

Not unlike a grant proposal, the letter of inquiry should include: an introduction, a description of your organization, a statement of need, your methodology, a brief discussion of other funding sources, and a final summary.

The introduction serves as the executive summary for the letter of inquiry and includes the name of your organization, the amount needed or requested, and a description of the project. The qualifications of project staff, a brief description of evaluative methodology, and a timetable are also included here. This should not exceed one paragraph.

The organization description should be concise and focus on the ability of your organization to meet the stated need. Provide a very brief history and description of your current programs while demonstrating a direct connection between what is currently being done and what you wish to accomplish with the requested funding. You will flesh this section out in greater detail if you are invited to submit a full proposal.

The statement of need is an essential element of the letter of inquiry and must convince the reader that there is an important need that can be met by your project. The statement of need includes: a description of the target population and geographical area, appropriate statistical data in abbreviated form, and several concrete examples.

The methodology should be appropriate to your statement of need and present a clear, logical, and achievable solution to the stated need. Describe the project briefly, including major activities, names and titles of key project staff, and your desired objectives. As with the organization description, this will be presented in far greater detail in a full proposal.

Other funding sources being approached for support of this project should be listed in a brief sentence or paragraph.

The final summary restates the intent of the project, affirms your readiness to answer further questions, and thanks the potential funder for its consideration.

Note: attachments should be included only at the direction of the potential funder and should be specific to its application guidelines.
There are a number of resources that provide information on letters of inquiry available for free use in Foundation Center libraries and many Cooperating Collections, including:


- *The Foundation Center's Guide to Winning Proposals* and *Guide to Winning Proposals II*. Includes actual cover letters, letters of inquiry, budgets, and vital supplementary documents needed to develop a complete proposal. Features grant proposals that have been funded by some of today’s most influential grantmakers. Each proposal – reprinted in its entirety – includes commentary by the program officer, executive director, or other funding decision maker who awarded that grant. Proposals are included from large and small, local and national organizations, and for many different support purposes, including basic budgetary support, special projects, construction, staff positions, and more.


- **Elements of a Grant Proposal**, sponsored by The Paladin Group, includes information on letters of intent from The Center for Nonprofit Management.

Source: The Foundation Center