

Writing a Letter of Inquiry that Funders will Love!

Many foundations request a letter of inquiry (LOI) rather than a full grant proposal. They may use the LOI to determine if they are going to invite an organization to submit a full proposal. Very frequently however, the LOI is all a grant maker may require to make a funding decision, so you definitely want to make this a compelling document.

The letter of inquiry is similar to a full grant proposal except that it is much shorter, generally 2 – 3 pages in length. Your writing style needs to be very tight and focused because you have such little space to include all the relevant information.

Be sure to cover all these points:

Introduction

The introduction includes the name of your organization, the amount of money being requested, and a description of the project involved. Be sure to explain how the project fits with the funder's guidelines and funding interests. Also check the previous grants made to ensure that you request an amount of money within their funding interests. If they only fund grants up to \$2,000, don't ask for \$50,000.

Organizational Narrative

Focus on your organization's ability to meet the need that you've stated. State a brief history of your nonprofit and briefly list your programs. Make sure to explain what your organization does and what you want to accomplish with this request.

Statement of Need

Explain the need that can be met by your project. Describe the target population and geographic area. Provide significant statistical facts. General statements will not work here such as "many" or "a high percentage". Use real numbers.

Process

How will you implement the program to achieve your desired outcome? Describe the project and include key actions, names and titles of staff (if in place), and your project's objectives.

Other Financial Sources: Include already secured funding, including in-kind donations, and indicate how you plan to continue the project in the future. Funders always want to see that the project is sustainable after their funding has made an impact.

Summary

Briefly restate your intent, invite additional questions, invite a site visit if applicable, and thank the funder for his or her time and consideration. Attachments that are consistent with the funder's guidelines can be included.

A budget may or may not be required for your letter of inquiry. Check the funder's guidelines. Some guidelines are very specific, and it is important to follow them to a "T". Many funders will not consider your program, no matter how well written your letter is if you have not followed their guidelines.

The following is an annotated sample letter, but you should feel free to adjust the format as you see fit, especially to meet the funder's guidelines. Put the letter on organization letterhead, use a legible font size, and include your contact address, phone number, and website. It is also good practice to attach your IRS exemption letter. The letter should be no more than two or three pages in length.



January 1, 2011 (date the letter)

Mr. John Doe, Trustee (address the letter to the contact name and their position if provided in guidelines)
Caring Foundation (include the foundation name and full address)
123 Jones Street
Any City, AA 12345

Dear Mr. Doe, (include proper salutation)

(INTRO) Thank you for reading our letter of inquiry to Caring Foundation. We appreciate the opportunity to tell you more about our Rural SPCA Pet Pantry Program. We are respectfully requesting your consideration of a grant in the amount of \$5,000.

This project is a continuation of our successful pilot program to provide pet food and supplies to families in economic distress. We are finding that families are often relinquishing their beloved family members to local shelters due to desperate economic circumstance. As shelters are already stretched beyond capacity, this additional influx leads to high euthanasia rates that could be avoided by providing basic support allowing the pets to stay in the home. Our program fits within your Foundation's areas of interest: animal welfare in Any County; reduction of animal euthanasia rates in our community, and human services, including economic relief.

(NARRATIVE) Rural SPCA, established in 2009, is the only animal welfare organization in our five city community, and we serve more than 50 families and an estimated 150 pets monthly at our Pet Pantry. Our mission is to promote responsible animal care and welfare. We provide educational events for responsible pet ownership, foster care for unwanted and abandoned pets, adoption events, and spay/neuter programs throughout the year.

(STATEMENT OF NEED) Over 50% of pet owners in our region are now at or below poverty income levels due to high unemployment in our rural area. They acquired pets at a time when they could afford the responsibility and are now faced with dire circumstances such as foreclosure and bankruptcy. Consequently, we launched the Pet Pantry project to test the effectiveness of providing basic necessities to help pets stay with their families. We know that by providing this service, we can ease the stress of households facing life altering decisions, and lessen the impact on already overrun shelters. The project was immediately successful, and coupled with our foster care network, no animals from our region were turned over to county shelters during 2010. The euthanization rate in Any County is 65.2% as cited in the county's own annual report, so we view keeping pets out of the shelters as critically important to our overall mission. (inclusion of actual statistics, not generalized statements)

(PROCESS) Our one-year program objectives include 1) continuing our partnership with the Rural Food Bank to share space for product and pickup; 2) increasing our inventory of food, toys, basic medical supplies and grooming products; 3) recruiting 5 more volunteers to staff the pantry; and 4) working closely with the Rural Family Resource Center to refer families in need to other services available in the community.

(OTHER FINANCIAL RESOURCES) The total cost of our program for one year is \$15,000. We have already received commitments totaling \$10,000 from other funders. Your investment of \$5,000 will complete the funding we need to ensure another year of our successful program.

(SUMMARY) We would be honored to partner with your foundation on this project that is truly making a difference in the lives of pets and their families. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 123-456-7890 (or by email at mnelson@ruralspca.org). We truly appreciate your consideration and look forward to hearing from you.

Best regards,
actual signature, not a stamp or electronic signature

Mike Nelson Executive Director Rural SPCA

P.S. I have enclosed a recent news article about the families we have assisted through the Pet Pantry Program. (attachment that may be of interest and is consistent with guidelines)