washington regional association of grantmakers

dc md va

Common Letter of Inquiry
User Guide

Welcome to the Washington Regional Association of Grantmakers' Common Letter of Inquiry (LOI). This user guide was revised in 2012 to reflect the changes in the LOI that were implemented at that time. This LOI is intended to streamline the grantmaking process and make it easier for both grant seekers and grantmakers.

About this user guide:
This guide will help those seeking grant funds to make the best use of the LOI by explaining the purposes of key elements of the application and suggesting some possible avenues for responding to particular sections. It is important to note that the examples provided in this guide are fictional and are intended to give you an idea of how to begin to approach the questions in the application. Your responses will likely require more detail than is provided in the examples.

While we have attempted to discuss any points that may be unclear, **it is very important that you contact the funder you are approaching if you have any questions about what that particular funder requires.**

Formatting Notes:
- Observe any formatting requirements the funder provides you. In general, your application should be easy to read: 12-point type size (Times New Roman or similar), one-inch margins all around, and page numbers on every page.

- Many funders have to make multiple copies of applications as part of their review process. Complicated bindings, including report covers or binders, interfere with this process and increase the funder's burden. Please observe the binding requirements.

The Letter of Intent/Inquiry Format is comprised of two elements: a cover sheet and the letter text itself.

The cover sheet asks for basic information about the organization, the contact person for the grant proposal, and the main facts about the request. This cover sheet is used by many funders for data-entry and grant tracking purposes; it may also help funders to determine quickly whether the application fits their guidelines.

The letter text should be no more than two (2) pages double-spaced.

Question 1: Briefly describe your organization's history and recent accomplishments.

"Recent" usually refers to the past 12 months. "Accomplishments" may include statistics on the organization's successes in pursuing its mission. Additional appropriate information might

include any awards won by the organization or staff members, significant national grants received, or new programs or products produced.

Example of accomplishments: "VAC's recent organizational accomplishments include:
1. "Awarded a $102,000 planning grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to design and plan a mobile HIV testing and counseling program for minority youth populations at high risk for HIV infection.
2. "Hosted a National AIDS Fund AmeriCorps member for the 4th consecutive year. AmeriCorps members assist in the implementation of this peer-based HIV prevention education program.
3. "Provided HIV/AIDS prevention education to 250 youth, ages 13-24, in three DCPS middle schools, three DCPS high schools, and five faith-based institutions last year.
4. "Provided HIV testing and counseling to an additional 250 youth at area festivals and events."

Question 2: Briefly describe the purpose of this funding request. What results are you committed to achieving? How do you intend to accomplish this? What is the timeline for these results? What evidence will prove your success?

Your response to this question should encompass all of the points it asks for. Below are some examples of ways to approach each part of the question to give you an idea of what a funder is looking for.

A. Purpose of this funding request:

Example: "ABC is requesting $40,000 in project support to provide and evaluate peer-based HIV prevention outreach activities within D.C.'s sex working community. Funding will partially support the cost of operating and maintaining an outreach van, staff time, and supplying condoms to outreach workers."

B. What results are you committed to achieving?

Here you describe what you will accomplish with this funding. Your response should be specific and realistic.

Example 1: "This out-of-school-time program will offer academic enrichment to elementary school students while providing a safe space after school. The program expects, at the end of the one-year period, to raise reading scores for 75 percent of the students by one grade level, and raise math scores for 65 percent of the students by one grade level."

Example 2: "This job-training program expects 90 percent of its participants over the course of the grant period will develop enough skills to draft a resume and be able to conduct a job interview. Sixty-five (65) percent will participate in at least one (1) job interview, and 40 percent will obtain jobs during the grant period. Of those who obtain jobs, 60 percent will still be employed in one year."

C. How do you intend to accomplish this?

Explain the activities you will undertake to accomplish your results.

Example: "The program provides weekly sessions covering the basics of job hunting, resume writing, and essential life skills such as punctuality and attitude. Job seekers will be paired with volunteers who will help them locate and apply for appropriate jobs. Once a job seeker has been hired, the program director will follow up with them on a monthly basis for one year, to support the "graduates" and assist with any problems that may arise."

D. What is the timeline for these results?

Briefly explain when you anticipate you will have achieved these results. Will it take one year? Multiple years?

E. What evidence will prove your success?

Example: "The Community Health Clinic will ensure that, among the 1,000 individuals enrolled in the Clinic's preventative care program, 85 percent of infants will receive recommended vaccinations prior to age 2; 80 percent of women aged 18 – 60 will receive annual Pap smears; and 100 percent of clients identified as being at risk for diabetes will enroll in a healthy eating program and complete two visits with the Clinic's nutritionist. The Clinic tracks overall health outcomes for all of its clients through a tracking database that is regularly maintained by trained clinical staff, as well as by medical case managers who see clients on a quarterly basis. This data will be used to evaluate the Clinic's results."

Question 3: If applying for general support, provide names and brief description of roles of your organization's partners and collaborators. If applying for project support, provide names and brief description of roles of partners and collaborators on this project.

Funders want to see that organizations are leveraging partnerships with others in the community in order to maximize their effectiveness. Partnerships and collaborations can serve a variety of purposes, including sharing resources, coordinating advocacy efforts, or improving operations.

Example: "Reading is Radical works with the District of Columbia Public Schools' central office to identify elementary schools with the lowest reading achievement scores and works closely with principals and teaching staff to coordinate the program during students' lunch hour. RR also partners with a number of after school programs and youth centers to integrate the reading program into their curricula. In addition, RR partners with several nonprofit organizations in D.C. that work with older adults to recruit volunteers."

Required attachments:
1. List of current funders (foundation, corporate, government, major donors) and amount of support.

>   **Note:** Non-cash as well as cash support should be included.

2. Organization's current budget
3. One page project budget (for project support requests only)

> **Note:** The project budget should represent the budget for the entire project, not just the amount being requested from the funder.

> Both the organizational budget and the project budget should include all categories for which there are expenses; consult the "Financials" section of the Common Grant Application for a representative list of categories. Include revenue and expenses for the current year.