

WHAT SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN A CONCEPT PAPER OR LETTER OF INQUIRY?

A Concept Document or Letter of Inquiry is a timesaver for anyone who might be an ally for your project and for the proposal writer, as it allows the reviewer to assess quickly what the project entails, what resources might be needed or helpful, who might be collaborators and if submitted for a more formal review, whether or not there is a good match between the funder's interests and the proposer's project.

Important

A concept paper or Letter of Inquiry when developed is not a vague exploration of an idea. It is assumed that you have already thought through your proposed project – including a budget! – and are just presenting an abbreviated description.

Techniques

When preparing for more formal review, use your words smartly. Write as if you are making a logical, persuasive argument based on need and capacity to meet that need rather than selling something. Avoid generic boilerplate phrasing, jargon, boosterism, and flowery subjective statements that can't be supported by facts or others' statements.

If the Concept or LOI is not being submitted for a competitive "Request for Proposals" (RFP), it is not inappropriate to ask a funder's program officer or senior staff member with whom you are in contact to review a final draft version before it is submitted formally. This can enhance significantly the prospect of a serious review of your application.

Contents

A Concept Paper or Letter of Inquiry becomes a condensed version of a proposal. You are giving the highlights of the same information in much the same order. For example, where you might use a page to cover an executive summary, in a Letter of Inquiry you do it in a paragraph.

Concept Papers or Letters of Inquiry generally are 2-3 pages.

Whether or not you are following specific Guidelines, most Concept Papers or LOI's will generally follow this format:

1. Opening Paragraph

- This serves as your summary statement.
- It should be able to stand alone. If the reviewer reads nothing else they should know what you want to do from reading this paragraph. Make it clear what you want the reader to know.
- Answer the following: who wants to do what? how much is being requested? is this a portion of a larger project cost? over what period of time is money being requested?
- You will want to identify if you are responding to an RFP (Request for Proposals) or make the connection between the funder's interests and your project.

2. Statement of Need (1-2 paragraphs)

- This section answers the "why" of the project.
- Explain what issue you are addressing.
- Explain why you have chosen to respond to this set of issues in the way that you have.
- State briefly why this matters in the area in which you will be working.
- Note specifically the population and number which benefits. Make sure you can indicate the public good achieved and the value to be gained by you and the University.

3. Project Activity (this will be the bulk of your letter)

- This section answers the "what" and "how" of the project.
- Give a general overview of the activities involved. Give more detailed information to the degree that space allows.
- Highlight why your approach is novel and deserving of the special attention.
- Indicate if there will be collaboration with other organizations and what their roles will be. Be specific about who does what.

4. Outcomes (1-2 paragraphs; you can put this before or after the discussion of activities)

- State what will be the specific outcomes achieved.
- Indicate how evaluation is part of the project – how will you know you've achieved these outcomes?
- Have you considered both formative and summative assessments?

5. Credentials (1-2 paragraphs)

- Demonstrate why your team, or you are best equipped to carry out this activity.
- Put any historic background about the institution and your own professional preparation for this project here.

6. Budget (1-2 paragraphs)

- State what the total project cost will be and how much of that you would be requesting. Indicate broad categories of activities to be funded.
- Include other sources of funding, both cash and in-kind. Especially indicate what the University will contribute. Do not overlook the value of all in-kind components – especially percent time salary contributions – including those of your collaborators.

7. Closing (1 paragraph)

- Offer to give any additional information someone might need.
- Give a contact name and contact information for follow-up. Indicate if one person is the administrative contact and another is the program contact.
- For an LOI--Express appreciation for the reader's attention or the opportunity to submit if it is in response to a Request for Proposals (RFP).
- Ask, "May we submit a full proposal?"