



NORTHWESTERN
UNIVERSITY

OFFICE OF FOUNDATION RELATIONS

FOUNDATION RELATIONS LETTER OF INQUIRY GUIDELINES

Foundations will usually indicate in published materials how they prefer to be contacted when you think you have a project that may interest them. Often, the first contact is via a brief, one to three page letter of inquiry. Alternatively, some foundations will ask that you file an initial letter of intent to apply for a program for which they have requested proposals (often via an RFP, or Request for Proposals).

Individual foundations may specify the content and length of this initial letter. In general, its purpose is to get the foundation interested in your project or proposal so that they will request a more detailed proposal.

Typically the first paragraph should begin with some sort of "hook" or effort to engage the reader's interest in the issue or problem you are addressing. Most first paragraphs should also include the following information:

1. Identification of your institution and department
2. The focus of your project
3. How your project relates to the foundation's interests or giving history
4. Amount requested

The body of the letter will then explain the project in more detail. Typically, the following are included:

1. Brief description of the project
2. Significance of project
3. The project director and his/her expertise in this field
4. Timetable
5. Northwestern's commitment to the project (financial or otherwise)
6. Other potential funding sources you plan to approach

Letters of inquiry should be clear and engaging. Initial research about the individual interests of the foundation is essential, and each letter should be tailored to the individual foundation prospect. Please check with the Office of Foundation Relations for clearance if you would like to approach a foundation. Our office also can help with research and editing as you prepare your letter of inquiry.