

PARK COUNTY
COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION



LETTERS OF INTEREST (LOIs) THAT MAKE THE BEST FIRST IMPRESSION

with Hannah Cortez
of the Dotted i Fundraising

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2022

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“LOIs That Make the Best First Impression”



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Hello!

I'm Hannah Cortez

I'm here today because I love helping nonprofits level-up their grant writing!

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Let's Get to Know Each Other!

- ✓ Your Name & Title
- ✓ Name of Organization

Please put your responses in the chat box so we can see who's in the room today!



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What to Expect from Our Session:

- Learn about the 3 different audience types
- Understand the differences between grantors
- Discover how to analyze grant guidelines to understand your target audience i.e. grant funders!
- Discuss the common elements of an LOI
- Learn what funders are looking for in your writing

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Why It's Important to Know Your Audience

Directs Strategy

Your audience affects both content (*what you say*) and style (*how you say it*).

Can influence your planning and writing decisions

Build Connection

What is your audience looking for?

Your content should provide useful and beneficial information.

You can let your personality show!

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“ The more you know about your audience (grant funder) and understand their needs, the easier it will be to meet those needs.



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The 3 Audience Types

Layman/General Audience

Has no special or expert knowledge of what your content.

Generally connects to human-interest pieces.

Needs more background info, details & definitions.

Might want graphics or visuals to help understand

Managerial Audience

May or may not have more knowledge than the lay audience.

Needs information to make a *decision*.

Wants highlighted background, facts, stats, etc. to reach a conclusion.

Expert Audience

Will generally have all the necessary background information about your topic.

Wants a very specific style of writing:

More technical vocabulary or industry specific language

Formal writing formats

Document citations

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Different Types of Foundation Audiences

Private/Family Foundations
Corporate Foundations
State & Federal Agencies

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Private/Family Foundations

- Generally made up of individuals who have a connection to the cause or mission. Impact driven!
- Decision-makers are often family members, board members, trustees, or program managers.
- Probably falls into **lay/managerial audience**

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Corporate Foundations

- Has specific priorities that align with the corporation and the communities they serve.
- Impact driven, but also concerned about the ROI--might be looking for more data.
- **Most likely falls into managerial audience.**

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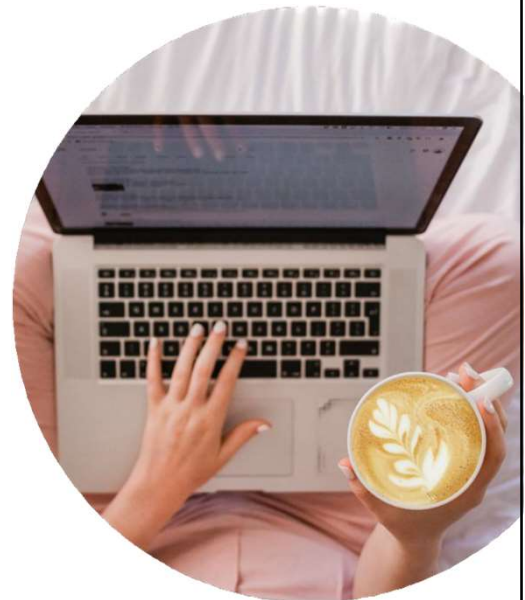
State & Federal Agencies

- Has VERY specific priorities, formatting requirements, and content expectations.
- Decision-makers could be peer reviewers, experts, program managers--might have to appeal to multiple readers.
- **Could fall under all 3 audience types**

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What Can We Learn from Profiling a Funder

- Key demographics
- Existing knowledge of community problem
- What they value
- What they need from you!



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How Do we Gather Useful Information?

There's no right or wrong way to gather information on your target audience. Here are a few ways we suggest digging for clues:

- ❖ Grant Guidelines/Application Questions
- ❖ Overall website
- ❖ Keywords/tone
- ❖ 990s
- ❖ Gather information from program managers
- ❖ Ask your friends!

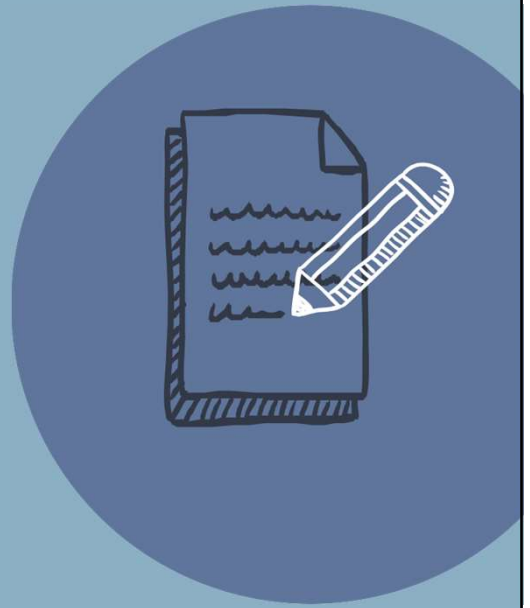
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Activity Time

Now it's time to put this into practice! We've developed a "Scavenger Hunt" type activity that will guide you through some of these questions and help you uncover information about your audience.

- ❖ There's no right or wrong answers
- ❖ While we try not to assume, sometimes all we can do is make a well educated guess
- ❖ This example **might** not apply to your organization. If that's the case, pretend it does so you can practice the concept.



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How Does This Make You A Better Writer?

Allows you to gauge how much information to convey.

What kind of details (and at what level) to include in your writing.

What concepts you should highlight or emphasize based on their priorities and "audience type"

What writing strategies to use: style, word choice, structure, etc.

How to organize your information based on what they need to know from you.

It makes you more prepared and allows you to develop a plan of action before you write!

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Knowing your audience can help you craft a letter of interest that makes the best first impression!



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LOIs are the “First Date” of Grantmaking

Know Your Funder

Do your research. Make sure that the foundation you are approaching is the right fit for your organization!

Be Prepared

If you want to make a good impression on the first date, you come prepared, right? You want to make sure you have thoroughly thought through the program you are requesting funds for.

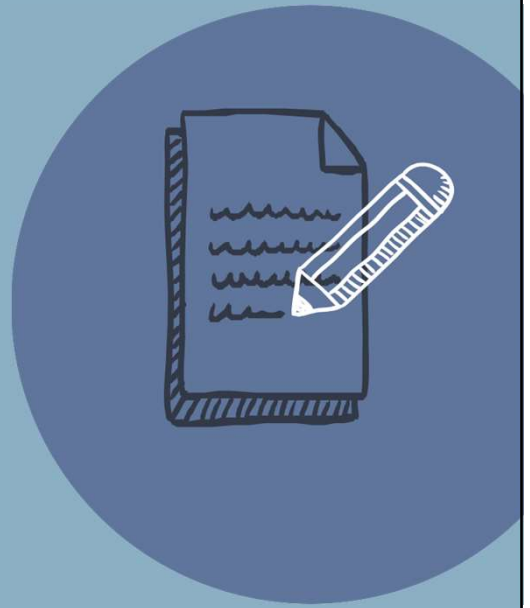
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LOI Formats

There are two formats you'll likely encounter:

- ❖ An online portal with commonly asked questions separated into sections.
- ❖ You have to mail in a hardcopy, 1-2 page letter to the foundation.



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What do Funders Want to Know?

- ❖ WHO are you serving?
- ❖ WHAT are you doing?
- ❖ WHEN is it taking place?
- ❖ WHERE is it taking place?
- ❖ WHY is this program important?
- ❖ HOW will you know you've made and impact?

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Common Elements in a Letter of Interest

Provide your organization's mission and vision statement:

Mission: focuses on what you're doing "today" and what your organization does to achieve it.

Vision: focuses on "tomorrow" and what your organization wants to accomplish.

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Common Elements in a Letter of Interest

Background information on your organization as a whole:

This is where the storytelling starts! When a funder asks about your organizational history, it's their way of getting to know your backstory. Use this opportunity to paint a picture for them about how your organization came to be. Accomplishments? Areas you've grown?

Provide an overview of your organization and what services or programs you offer? This should provide a snapshot of the work you do overall to provide context for the funder. This might be a great place to show alignment with their priority areas!

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Common Elements in a Letter of Interest

Summarize the clients/community your organization serves across all programs:

This is who your organization serves as a whole--you may have different clients for different projects, so you can elaborate on that in the project description section.

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Common Elements in a Letter of Interest

What overall need does your organization or program address?

Your needs statement answers the question, "What is the need your organization/program is addressing?" and identifies the importance and urgency of the problem you are trying to solve.

1. Description of the problem--what is the problem that you are trying to solve.
2. Recognition of the problem --Why is it a problem?
3. Implications if Problem isn't Solved--What will happen to your community/target population if this need goes unmet? Why is it important to solve?
4. Why *your* organization is the one to solve this problem.



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What are Funders Looking for in Your Writing?

To put it simply:

- Details
 - Avoid being too direct (not using enough detail) or using too much detail (not answering the ?)
- A well thought out plan!
- SMART goals and deliverables that create impact
- Well-aligned programs/projects that advance their mission
- Language that is clear, concise, and compelling. (avoid industry jargon, but reflect their own language back to them!)
- Data/evidence that supports your claims



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Any questions?

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Ways to work with The Dotted i!

- ❖ FREE 30 Minute Discovery Call (you can book through our website)
- ❖ Grant Research Package
- ❖ Monthly Writing Contracts- 6 to 12 months of readiness, research, and writing!

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Thanks!

Keep in Touch

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