

GRANT WRITING FUNDAMENTALS



A Section-by-Section Guide
and Worksheet to Start Your
Next Application NOW



WHAT YOU'LL GET OUT OF THIS GUIDE:

The following guide outlines the standard sections of a grant proposal, with practical tips and examples tailored to arts and culture nonprofits. Whether the organization is new to fundraising or working on their first application, this breakdown will help organizations understand and navigate proposal structure.

LETTER OF INTENT	01
ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORY	02
STATEMENT OF NEED	02
PROJECT DESCRIPTION	03
TARGET AUDIENCE	03
EVALUATION	04
BUDGET	04
SUPPORTING MATERIALS	05
CONCLUSION	05
FINAL CHECKLIST	06
FILLABLE PROPOSAL PRACTICE WORKSHEET	07 - 10

LETTER OF INTENT OR INQUIRY (LOI)

WHAT IT IS

A brief, formal document submitted to a funder prior to a full grant proposal. Some funders provide specific templates or online submission forms, while others accept a standard letter, and will typically include the following information:

- Who the organization is (organization intro)
- What the organization is requesting (amount + purpose)
- Why it matters (impact)
- A warm but professional tone

Tip: *Writing should be concise and compelling – think “first impression” – using a warm, but professional tone.*

WHEN IT'S USED

A LOI is used to determine alignment between a project and a funder's priorities before submitting a full proposal. For some funders, the LOI is a required part of the formal grant review process, with specific submission deadlines and guidelines. In other cases, especially when the application process is less defined, an LOI may serve as an introductory letter to the funder, requesting guidance on how to proceed with a full application.



ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW / HISTORY

WHAT IT IS

A snapshot of the organization's mission, background, and activities.

WHAT TO INCLUDE

- **Mission Statement** – As stated in the Articles of Incorporation (unchanged).
- **Founding & Status** – Year established and confirmation of nonprofit/tax-exempt status.
- **Programs & Services** – Brief description of core activities.
- **Community Served** – Who benefits from the organization's work (audience, participants, region).
- **Key Achievements** – Major milestones, recognitions, or impact highlights.

TIP: This section should be brief but compelling – include 2–3 standout statistics or accomplishments that quickly show the organization's scale and impact.

STATEMENT OF NEED / PROBLEM STATEMENT

WHAT IT IS

Defines the community specific problem that the project aims to solve. What gap, challenge, or opportunity is the organization addressing?

WHAT TO INCLUDE

- The issue or opportunity in the community
- Why it's urgent or important
- Who is affected and how
- Data or testimonials to back it up

TIP: Be specific. "The city lacks accessible, creative outlets for youth" is more compelling than "We need more arts programs."

PROJECT DESCRIPTION / PROGRAM NARRATIVE

WHAT IT IS

A high-level overview at what the organization is proposing to do with the funding. While the problem statement addresses a gap in community needs, the project description defines how the problem will be solved

WHAT TO INCLUDE

- Description of the program/project
- Goals and objectives
- Activities and timeline
- Who will be involved (staff, artists, partners)
- Intended outcomes

TIP: *Think like a storyteller. Take the reader on a journey from vision to execution.*

TARGET AUDIENCE / COMMUNITY IMPACT

WHAT IT IS

Details about who will benefit and how.

WHAT TO INCLUDE

- The group/population impacted by the problem that the organization intends to serve. (demographics, geography, needs)
- How they'll engage with the program
- Why it matters to them
- How the community is involved or consulted

TIP: *Leverage reliable demographic data sources (ex. the census) to demonstrate the need for equitable impact for a specific target group.*

EVALUATION / SUCCESS METRICS

WHAT IT IS

How the organization will measure the project's effectiveness.

WHAT TO INCLUDE

- Goals vs. measurable outputs & outcomes
- How data will be collected (surveys, attendance, testimonials)
- What success looks like
- How results will be shared or used

TIP: *Don't overpromise. Keep goals realistic and grounded in the organization's actual capacity.*

BUDGET + BUDGET NARRATIVE

WHAT IT IS

A financial breakdown of what the project will cost and how funds will be used.

WHAT TO INCLUDE

- Line-item expenses (artist fees, space rental, supplies, etc.)
- Revenue sources (ticket sales, other grants, in-kind support)
- Explanation of key costs (the "why" behind the numbers)

TIP: *Match the numbers to the narrative. If the organization says they're paying local artists, the budget should reflect that. Don't forget to include relevant program salaries to the budget.*

ATTACHMENTS / SUPPORTING MATERIALS

WHAT IT IS:

Additional documents to strengthen the organization's case.

COMMON ATTACHMENTS:

- IRS 501(c)(3) letter
- Board of Directors list
- Letters of support or community testimonials
- Recent financials
- Media or press coverage
- Artistic work samples (images, video links, brochures)

Tip: *Keep it clean and organized. Label attachments clearly and only include what's requested.*

SUMMARY / CONCLUSION (IF APPLICABLE)

WHAT IT IS:

A closing paragraph that ties everything together.

WHAT TO INCLUDE:

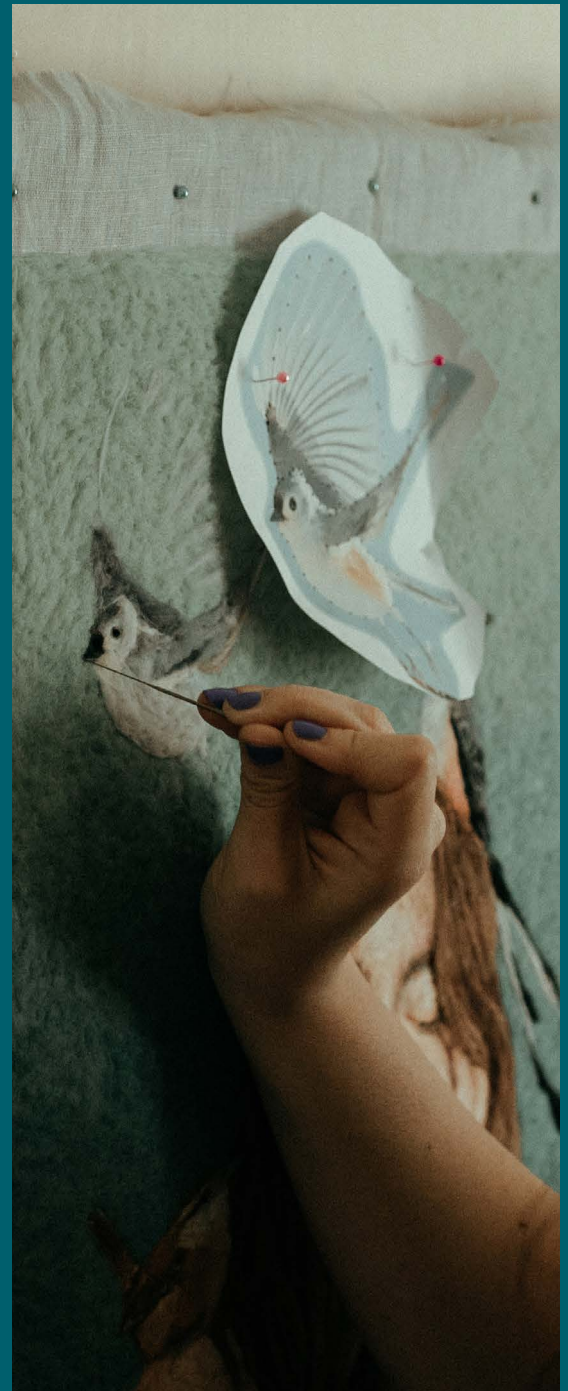
- Restate the request
- Emphasize the impact
- Invite further conversation

Tip: *End with gratitude and confidence. "We'd be honored to partner with you..."*

FINAL CHECKLIST FOR FIRST-TIME GRANT WRITERS:

- ❑ Follow the funder's guidelines exactly (format, page limit, deadline)
- ❑ Get input from program and finance staff
- ❑ Proofread carefully (typos matter!)
- ❑ Save templates and samples for future use
- ❑ Avoid jargon. Write clearly and accessibly

Tip: *Writing in third person makes the narrative more direct and specific.*



GRANT PROPOSAL PRACTICE WORKSHEET

Organization
Name:

Project/
Program Name:

01. Cover Letter / Letter of Intent (LOI)

Who is the organization (organization intro)

What the organization is requesting (amount + purpose)

Why it matters (brief impact)

02. Organizational Overview

Mission Statement

Year Founded & History Highlights

Key Programs / Services

Who the Organization Serves

03. Statement of Need / Problem Statement

Describe the problem the organization aims to address. Include any key data or quotes that support the case.

04. Project Description / Program Narrative

Project Title

Brief Description

Goals & Objectives (List 2-3)

Key Activities & Timeline

Partners or Key Staff

05. Target Audience / Community Impact

Who will benefit from this project? Be specific

Why does this matter to the community?

06. Evaluation / Success Metrics

How will the organization measure success?

Tools the organization will use (surveys, testimonials, etc.)

07. Budget Planning Snapshot

Key Expenses (3-5 line items)
Total Amount Requested
Does the organization have other revenue sources or in-kind support?

08. Attachments You Plan to Include

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 501(c)(3)• Letter Board List• Letters of Support• Financials Work Samples• Media Coverage

09. Conclusion

How will the organization close the proposal on a strong, confident note?



Written by Bex Ferrell, PhD & Kaitlyn Hardiman