**What is a Concept Paper, also known as an “LOI”?**

“LOI” can stand for Letter of Interest, Letter of Intent, or Letter of Introduction. The purpose of an LOI is to introduce your research or creative project in a concise format that is easy for anyone to understand. LOIs should be tailored to the person or organization to which you are sending. Some funders require LOIs to be in a specific format, so check their guidelines. The majority of LOIs are most effective when they are kept to one page, or two pages if they include visuals (even better). LOIs for research projects to government agencies (like the National Institutes of Health or National Science Foundation) should include a list and description of your research questions.

From the funder’s point of view, an LOI helps them determine if the proposed project aligns with its mission and strategic goals, is competitive for funding and is likely to make an impact.

From your point of view as a faculty member, developing an LOI can save you time and help you connect with potential funders or collaborators. By sending an LOI to a potential funder you will make personal contact with them and discover whether they are interested in your project before you go through the effort of writing a full funding proposal. Moreover, funding priorities often change each year and are not always published. Sending a funder an LOI before applying for funding gives you the inside scoop on whether your project is a good fit for their current priorities. You can also send an LOI to people or organizations to enlist their collaboration.

**Instructions**

Delete this first page to use the rest of the document as a template. Replace each paragraph with your own. Change the footer to include your contact information.

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**<insert title of research or creative project>**

**Introduction**: *This “mini abstract” is the most important section of your concept paper* because it is the first thing the targeted funder will read. Be sure opening sentences are compelling and enthusiastic about your project’s significance and impact. Briefly summarize (1) the significant problem or need you will address and why it is important; (2) your research question(s) or creative inspiration, goal(s), and/or objectives; and (3) the significance and broad (grandiose) impact of your anticipated findings. Include language to demonstrate you understand the strategic priorities of the targeted funding agency as well as the types of projects they fund. Make a *clear and strong link between their priorities and your good idea*. Remember, you want them to “buy” your project, so sell it by explaining how your research or scholarly creative activity advances their cause. Extract a relevant quote from the funder’s strategic plan, and use words and phrases from other documents so the program officer literally sees their organization reflected in the description of your project. **It’s best to either keep the length of a LOI to one page, or add pictures, graphics, or diagrams to make it two pages.**

**The Team:** Provide a brief description of the team and their expertise in one to two sentences. The contacts at the bottom of the page should include the appropriate leader of your organization most aware of your project (i.e. Dean, Director, Chair, etc.) and the principal investigator (PI)/project director (PD).

**The Need**: The goal of this section is to answer four questions: 1) What is the problem your project will address? 2) Who is affected by the problem? 3) Is the issue compelling? 4) Will your project make an impact?A significant story or statistic will make this section memorable. Statistics gain the reader’s interest, but stories often gain support. Finally, describe *why your project matters; what is the “so what?”* As you craft this description, keep in mind that most program officers or other staff at the agency are not as immersed as you are in the topic. Therefore, you must persuade them that they really should care about your project by linking the problem to their organization’s funding priorities and describing the potential short- and long-term impact of your project.

**Initial Data Collected:** Only include this section if you have preliminary or pilot data.

**Project Description (or “Plans for Continued Research”):** Use the latter title if you have initial data collected. Concisely describe your project, including *what you plan to do* and how you plan to do it); *who is involved* in the research; and *who will benefit*, directly and indirectly. If it is a pilot project to collect preliminary data and/or refine research methodologies, be direct in saying so. Describe the *innovative aspects of your research approach* to set your project apart from other projects the reviewer has seen. *Connect the description to The Need* presented in the previous section by indicating the extent to which your project fills in an existing gap or expands upon the literature and addresses a critical problem or need. Using information in your *Project Work Plan*, include a few major *milestones and a concise, general timeline* of what you will accomplish. As always, avoid the temptation to include the nitty-gritty details.

**Future Goals:** Describe future goals to expand the project after this initial phase is complete.

**Conclusion:** Restate why the project is important and how it is innovative; its goal(s), objectives, and expected outcomes; and how it adds new knowledge to your field. Then think in broad, grandiose terms and identify who benefits from the research project, considering its impact upon your participants as well as the college and university, San Marcos, Central Texas, the US, the world.

End this section with a strong statement of how the project *aligns with the funder’s strategic priorities* and the potential broader impacts of your findings.

**References:** (only include this if appropriate/necessary)