

The Grantwriter's Toolbox: Letters of Support

Who Contributes Letters of Support?

Letters of support are used to strengthen a grant application. These typically come from three kinds of supporters; *collaborators*, *constituents*, or *outside endorsers*. Collaborators add credibility to a grant application, and most, if not all funders prefer to see evidence of collaboration, and saving of duplication and overlap.

Collaborators

Collaborators are those who are participating in the project with you. Their letters of support should include sufficient information so that the funder will be aware of the collaborator's participation and allow the funder to evaluate the collaborator's contribution to the project.

Letters from collaborators should include the following:

Description of the nature of the collaboration

Non-financial contributions to project if applicable. Such contributions could include:

- Expertise
- Deliverables, i.e. products, reports, evaluation services, etc.
- Personnel
- Resources

Financial Contributions if applicable. These may include

- Cash
- In-kind contributions (non-monetary services, to which a cost may be attached.)
- Matching funds

Financial Arrangements

If the collaborator is receiving a piece of the grant funding, then this should also be spelled out in the letter.

Expected outcomes, results, and value resulting from the collaboration.

State what the benefits will be from the collaboration. Use numbers and examples.

Outside Endorsers

Outside Endorsers are people who no direct participation in *execution* of the project, but who do have a stake the project's *outcome* . Outside Endorsers add credibility and weight your application.

Typical Outside Endorsers

- Colleagues in the field
- Others who have funded your work
- Politicians, Government Agencies familiar with your work

Letters need to make clear:

- Relationship between your agency and endorser
- Value and results obtained or demonstrated

Examples:

- A youth services agency endorses a project run by a trade association designed to create apprenticeships in a particular technical field. The youth agency might not be directly involved in the project, but it might make the point that the youth agency's clients would benefit from an apprenticeship program, The youth agency's letter might also contribute background statistics on demographics and need for opportunities for out-of-school youth not planning to go to college.
- A local development corporation endorses the same project, citing statistics about the loss of jobs in the local county, and the need for positioning the local work force to take advantage of newly emerging business opportunities in renewable energy.

Constituents

Letters from constituents and beneficiaries benefit from concrete facts and figures for the *current* grant application. Individual stories are very powerful. Any letter with specific outcomes will be more powerful than one citing generalities.

For example, a student in an adult learning program might include statements such as:

"Before coming to The Learning Center, I was reading at a third-grade level. I worked with teachers and volunteers at TLC for two years, and was able to raise my reading level to sixth grade. After working as a laborer for seven years, I have entered a two-year apprenticeship program for electricians, and expect to graduate as a licensed journeyman electrician in May of this year."

Since such testimonials may be used across several applications, be sure that they up-to-date. A fresh copy of a letter with a current date and signature will be evidence of current support and relevance.

Constituent Letter Components:

Constituent letters should include:

- Background of the constituent
- Relationship with your agency
- How the constituent benefited.

Example Benefits

Constituent letters provide third-party evidence of your efficacy as an agency, any statistics cited will provide additional credibility. Numbers rule! For example:

- Home-healthcare: Number of home-health care patients served, compared with last year. How many home healthcare nurses and aides participated? What is the ratio of nurses to patients? Are total costs and cost per patient going up or down? How many patients were served at home as opposed to nursing homes?
- Number of jobs created. Number of new companies created. Number companies declaring bankruptcy or moving out of the area. Net gain or loss of jobs? Type and quality of jobs; Average salary and benefits. Number of jobs upgraded or saved.
- Land Conservation: Acres of land conserved. Numbers of conservation easements,

General Guidelines for Letters of Support

Introduce yourself. Include a description and qualifications of the letter writer.

Addressee should be either the funder or your agency.

Include a sentence about the experience or history with your agency, if available.

Specifically cite the solicitation number and solicitation title if these exist. Many funders are fielding applications for multiple programs.

One or two paragraphs of text in the body of the letter.

Use specifics; numbers, timelines, outcomes.

Specify expected outcomes (with numbers) of your relationship with the funder.

Format

- No more than one page in length
- Letter should be on the contributor's own letterhead
- Include a written signature and title of an official of the contributor's agency or company
- Submit as a .PDF file and and/or hard copy

Regarding the last point; most grant applications these days are submitted electronically. At least some of the narrative components will include longer discussions created within a word-processor (Microsoft Word for example) and then exported to an Adobe .PDF file. The .PDF files are then either uploaded individually to the grantmaker's web site, or the files may be combined into a single long .PDF which is uploaded or sent as an eMail attachment.

Because of the logistics involved, it makes sense to try to get letters of support early on, and if you can't get .PDF files from letter providers, you need to be able to either convert the files they send you to .PDF yourself, or use a scanner to create a .PDF from a hard copy. Don't beat up your letter providers if they can't give you a .PDF. Make sure you have the tools in place to do the conversions if needed.

It is helpful too, if you have a scanned image of your signature, to add to letters of support that you create. Encourage your contributors to have have this as well, so that letters of support that you received are *signed*.

Timing

Outside Endorsers

Outside endorsers can be solicited early in the grant application process; as soon as you have a solid program abstract available to enclose in your request for the letter. You'll need the abstract so that they know what they are endorsing. The abstract also may prompt them to contribute additional ideas for developing a strong application. "You really should go and talk to "

Collaborators

Collaborators should include a general description of the financial arrangements and commitments in their letters of support. Solicit letters from collaborators after the budget and program plan have been defined and you have a working agreement in place.

Constituents

Constituent letters are usually less time sensitive, because the background material in these deals with things that have already happened. However it is wise not to wait until the last minute, especially if you think you might have .PDF formatting and conversion issues.

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