Virginia Board for People with Disabilities

Letters of Interest (LOI) and Proposal Submission Tips

Table of Contents

I. **General Submission Tips** 3

II. **Tips for Specific Sections of the Narrative** 6

Applicant Profile 6

Target Population 7

Involvement of Individuals with DD & Families 7

Collaboration 7

Systems Change, Capacity Building, & Sustainability 8

Activities, Outcomes, and Strength of Evidence (Stage I) & Work Plan: Project Goal, Objectives, Activities, Outputs, Outcomes, and Stories (Stage II) 8

Strength of Evidence (Part of the "Activities, Outcomes, and Strength of Evidence" section in Stage I, and a stand-alone section in Stage II) 9

Evaluation Plan (Only Stage II) 10

This *Letters of Interest (LOI) and Proposal Submission Tips* document was developed as a resource for applicants based on the most common issues identified by the Board during LOI/Proposal review. This document is a supplement and is not intended to replace information and guidelines contained in the Request for Proposal (RFP) and/or Grants Manual.

We appreciate your interest in grant funding and working with the Board on issues for people with developmental and other disabilities.

Submission Tips for Letters of Interest & Proposals

I. General Submission Tips

1. Create DD Suite online account in advance of Letter of Interest (LOI) due date

- All Letter of Interest (LOI) and Full Proposal applications must be submitted via the DD Suite online submission system.
- Be sure to register with DD Suite well in advance of the LOI due date.

2. Start preparing the application early.

- Allow plenty of time to gather required information and submit well before the deadline.
- Power failures and other unexpected problems can occur and late applications **will not** be accepted.

3. Follow the instructions in the Request for Proposal (RFP) carefully.

- Be sure you have reviewed the RFP and the Grants Manual before completing your proposal. Critical information is contained in both of these documents.
- Compile all information for your LOI and Full Proposal in the order requested. If you deviate from the required submission format, your technical submission score will be reduced.
- Utilize only forms provided by the Board. No other form sets should be submitted.
- Be sure to fully complete all application elements and responses to the program requirements.
- Proposals that do not cover all of the required elements will be marked down in the scoring process.

4. Keep your audience in mind.

- Do not assume that grant reviewers are familiar with your organization, service area, or the needs of your community. Your application should be easily understood by a wide variety of audiences, some of whom will know nothing about your organization. Follow this guideline even if you have previously worked with the Board or received funding from the Board.

- Keep the LOI and Proposal review and scoring criteria in mind when preparing your application(s).

5. Be clear and concise.

- Provide accurate and complete information, including accounts of challenges that exist and realistic plans to address them. If you omit any required information or data, explain why.
- Make sure the information you provide in each table, chart, attachment, etc., is consistent with the proposal and/or budget narrative and information in other sections of your proposal.
- Your budget should directly correlate with the proposed activities. Complete all forms accurately and completely.

6. Be organized and logical.

- Many applications fail to receive a high score because the reviewers cannot follow the various proposal elements or the components of the application do not fit together in a cohesive way.

7. Support your discussion with evidence.

- Your application should demonstrate your ability to be a responsible steward of grant funds and demonstrate your organizational capacity to conduct the grant activities. Show evidence of fiscal stability and sound fiscal and administrative management.
- Provide data and/or research literature to support your discussion, when possible and appropriate, and note the source. Source documentation should be provided within the page limits of your project Narrative, as specified in the RFP. The sources can be noted within the main body of text, as footnotes, or as endnotes, depending on your preference.

8. Be sure that the required matching funds are appropriately calculated.

- Unless otherwise noted in the Request for Proposal (RFP), grantees are required to contribute a **minimum match** (cash or in-kind) of **25 percent of total project costs** (grant funds + match). Federal funds <u>cannot</u> be used as match. If the project <u>primarily</u> serves a Designated Poverty Area, the minimum match requirement is 10 percent of total project costs.

9. Be mindful of attachment sizes.

- Uploaded attachments in DD Suite must be no larger than 128MB in size.
- Your LOI and/or proposal application (including appendices) should be uploaded as **one (1)** complete file.

10. Proofread and review your electronic application to ensure accuracy and completion.

- When submitting electronically in DD Suite, print out the application before submitting it to ensure appropriate formatting and adherence to page limit requirements.
- Ensure that your application includes all required appendices before submitting.

11. Submit all information before the posted deadline.

- The Board will not consider additional information and/or materials submitted after the posted due date/time.
- Additionally, the Board will not accept e-mailed applications or supplemental materials, unless there is a DD Suite system issue.

12. The Grants and Contracts Manager can answer technical questions throughout the process related to the use of DD Suite and/or the technical submission requirements. The Grants and Contracts Manager cannot respond to any substantive questions, however, as this would potentially provide an advantage to the applicant.

II. Tips for Specific Sections of the Narrative

Below are tips specific to each requested narrative section of a Letter of Interest and/or proposal. Please note that the Letter of Interest (Stage I) is not expected to have the same level of detail as the proposal (Stage II). Nonetheless, grantees should try to address the tips below to the extent possible and relevant in both stages.

In all relevant sections of your narrative, be sure you clearly define the problem your project is trying to address, and provide data (with the sources noted) to support this problem when possible and appropriate. Source documentation should be provided within the page limits of your project Narrative, as specified in the RFP. The sources can be noted within the main body of text, as footnotes, or as endnotes, depending on your preference.

1. Applicant Profile

- Do not assume that grant reviewers are familiar with your organization, service area, or the needs of your community.

- Provide data and/or research to support any relevant successes your organization has had, and note the source and methodology, when relevant.

2. Cultural & Linguistic Competence

- Describe how your organization is cognizant of and achieves cultural competence in its work. The Board considers cultural competence by its grantees to include the following: the organization has defined values, principles and policies that demonstrate that (1) diversity and differences are valued; and (2) the organization is able to work effectively across cultures and adapt to the cultural context of the communities being served.

- The National Center for Cultural Competence (NCCC) at Georgetown University defines linguistic competence as "…the capacity of an organization and its personnel to communicate effectively, and convey information in a manner that is easily understood by diverse groups including persons of limited English proficiency, those who have low literacy skills or are not literate, individuals experiencing disabilities, and those who are deaf or hard of hearing. Linguistic competence requires organizational and provider capacity to respond effectively to the health and mental health literacy needs of populations served. The organization must have policies, structures, practices, procedures, and dedicated resources to support this capacity."

3. **Target Population**

- For projects providing direct services to the disability population, 60 percent of those served must be persons with developmental disabilities. If you do not make it clear that you are serving persons with developmental disabilities at the required level, your proposal will not be funded.
- For projects that indirectly serve people with developmental disabilities, such as projects that train direct support professionals or family members, detail how people with developmental disabilities will be the ultimate primary beneficiaries.
- Include the number and types of people who will be reached through the project e.g., number of people with developmental disabilities, number of direct support professionals.
- Explain any particular characteristics of individuals whom you are targeting, when relevant. For example, are you targeting certain disabilities, certain age groups, people living in certain geographic locations or types of residences, people with certain skill/knowledge levels, and/or people with certain goals/interests?
- Explain how you plan to identify/select individuals who will participate in your project, if relevant. This might include outreach activities or screening methods.

4. **Involvement of Individuals with DD & Families**

- Explain how people with developmental disabilities and family members will be actively involved in each of the development, implementation, and evaluation phases, when relevant.

5. **Collaboration**

- Be as specific as possible when explaining who your planned collaborators or partners are. For example, list the number of schools and names of the schools that will be involved rather than more broadly referencing the Richmond school system.
- When planning your collaborators or partners, consider all the key stakeholders (e.g., advocacy organizations, state agencies, experts, beneficiaries) who may be relevant to your project and how they might be able to play a role.

- Clarify the extent to which you have discussed the project with your planned collaborators or partners, and the extent to which the planned collaborators or partners have expressed interest in participating.
- If you plan to collaborate or partner with other organizations on the project, you must attach letters of commitment to the proposal (Stage II). A letter of support is not the same as a letter of commitment. The latter details the specific agreement of the individual or organization to participate in the project along with what they will do. General letters of support will be accepted but do not replace letters of commitment.

6. Systems Change, Capacity Building, & Sustainability

- Clarify if your project is supporting an (i) existing program/service, (ii) expansion of an existing program/service by, for example, serving a new type of audience, or (iii) entirely new program/service. The Board does not fund existing projects or services that are part of an organization's current program or budget. Nor does the Board fund projects that are part of the organization's existing mandate.
- Explain how your project will build on existing resources (e.g., funding sources, services, information, products) rather than duplicating existing resources.
- Explain how the project will benefit the broader Commonwealth, not just your individual organization and individuals who come into contact with your individual organization. Consider whether project materials will be relevant statewide and, if not, how they could be made more relevant.
- Explain how the project materials, if relevant, will be made accessible to key stakeholders and the broader Commonwealth. Keep in mind that the Board and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services shall retain royalty-free, non-exclusive and irrevocable rights to reproduce, publish or otherwise use, and to authorize others to use the material developed under the grant or contract.
- Consider whether any materials produced by your project will need to be updated after the project ends, and if so, how the updates will be funded and implemented.

7. Activities, Outcomes, and Strength of Evidence (Stage I) & Work Plan: Project Goal, Objectives, Activities, Outputs, Outcomes, and Stories(Stage II)

- Ensure that the project outputs and outcomes are very clear/tangible. Quantify the expected outputs and outcomes whenever relevant and possible. For more information on outputs and outcomes, consult the evaluation plan tip sheet on our grants webpage.
- A logic model can help you think through the outputs and outcomes that you expect to result from your work plan activities. For more information, see this logic model overview from the Information and Technical Assistance Center for Councils on Developmental Disabilities. The overview was developed to help organizations like the Board develop long-term strategic plans, but it can also be applied to individual grant projects.
- Choose activity timelines that are realistic for your project rather than aspirational.
- For the proposal (Stage II), when choosing your activity timelines, please keep in mind that expenses for any activities that start prior to the grant period are the responsibility of the grantee. The **one exception** is pre-award expenditures related to attendance at a mandatory grantee orientation held prior to the grant period begin date.
- For the proposal (Stage II), specify both outputs **and** outcomes for each work plan activity to the extent possible.
- For the proposal (Stage II), please indicate which specific work plan activity is expected to result in the selected outputs and outcomes. This can be done by listing the outputs and outcomes within the relevant work plan activity, per the template, rather than at the end of the work plan.
- For the proposal (Stage II), do not limit outputs and outcomes to those that relate to the federal performance measures. Applicants are no longer expected to identify relevant federal performance measures in their proposal. Board staff will work with successful applicants to identify relevant federal performance measures prior to the project start date. In your proposal, you should include all expected outputs and outcomes that are relevant to demonstrate project impact.

8. Strength of Evidence (Part of the "Activities, Outcomes, and Strength of Evidence" section in Stage I, and a stand-alone section in Stage II)

- Provide data and/or research literature to support your discussion, when possible and appropriate, and note the source. Source documentation should be provided within the page limits of your project Narrative, as specified in the RFP.

The sources can be noted within the main body of text, as footnotes, or as endnotes, depending on your preference.

- Explain how your project's activities are evidence-based, versus just providing evidence of the need for the project (e.g., problem statement).

9. Evaluation Plan (Only Stage II)

- Be as specific as possible. It is not sufficient to list a generic evaluation method (e.g., We will use surveys to evaluate the project."). Instead, you should clearly detail
  - **each** evaluation method you plan to use (e.g., registration lists, social media analytics, polls, surveys, interviews, etc.),
  - how **each** evaluation method will be administered (e.g., in person or virtual),
  - who will be involved in **each** evaluation method (e.g., who will administer it and who is the target population),
  - when **each** method will occur throughout the project (e.g., prior to participation, immediately following participation, and/or 3 or 6 months following participation), and
  - what information will be obtained from **each** evaluation method (e.g., list specific outputs and outcomes tied to your work plan activities).
- Explain whether any of your evaluation tools are based on existing resources and whether they are evidence-based.
- Your expected outputs and outcomes should drive your evaluation plan. Your evaluation plan should identify how **each** of the outputs and outcomes you listed in the work plan section will be obtained, including the required demographic information for participants with developmental disabilities and their family members (if applicable).
- Provide any other relevant information including any anticipated challenges and how you will try to address any anticipated challenges.
  - For more information, consult the evaluation plan tip sheet on our grants webpage. The tip sheet discusses provides examples of good evaluation plans for various types of project activities, including related outputs and outcomes.