

SAMPLE LETTER OF INQUIRY

Program Officer
XYZ Foundation

Dear Mr. Grantor:

ORGANIZATION A requests the opportunity to submit a full proposal to the XYZ Foundation to support our Affordable, Safe, and Habitable Housing Project (“Affordable Housing Project”). The Project is a multi-faceted and comprehensive program that will dramatically improve the housing conditions for low-income residents, increase the affordable housing stock, and strengthen low-income neighborhoods and communities in Our County.

Our Affordable Housing Project will provide much-needed legal advocacy, including potential litigation, to already existing organizing efforts of community agencies. It will bring together legal advocates, the community, government agencies, and nonprofit housing providers to address the housing crisis that currently exists. The Affordable Housing Project addresses several of the XYZ Foundation’s Community Outcomes, most notably “Individuals and families live in housing that is safe, supportive, and affordable.” We request a grant of \$40,000 in support of the project’s \$95,000 budget.

Comment [DM1]: Tied specifically to the funder

Comment [DM2]: Specific amount and how it fits into the entire project budget

Organization Description: Since our founding in 1000, ORGANIZATION A has been committed to improving the quality of life, enhancing economic opportunity, protecting the social safety net, and alleviating economic inequality through the provision of legal services and advocacy to low-income residents in Our County. We provide a broad range of legal services through a combination of systemic advocacy, community education, direct representation and advice. Our systemic advocacy, including impact litigation, often benefits all Californians. ORGANIZATION A’s core programs are: housing, family and consumer law, language access and self-sufficiency/economic support/public benefits.

Our staff and board reflect the diverse communities that we serve, including Whites (40.9%), Latinos (19%), African Americans (14.6%), Asian/Pacific Islanders (20.9%), and other people of color. Some of our recent accomplishments include: 1) requiring the City code enforcement agency to begin to translate notices into languages other than English, 2) devising a plan for meeting the needs of non-English speakers, and 3) obtaining agreements regarding training of inspectors and other agency changes that will help improve how the City Agency serves tenants. We were the driving force behind the City Equal Access Ordinance that requires agencies to provide their services in a language-accessible manner.

Comment [DM3]: track record

The Opportunities/Need the Project Addresses: Healthy and sustainable communities, neighborhoods, and individuals require habitable and affordable housing. But, as documented by Barbara Ehrenreich (*Nicked and Dimed: On (Not) Getting by in America, 2000*), “when the rich and poor compete for housing on the open market, the poor don’t stand a chance...the poor have necessarily been forced into housing that is more expensive, dilapidated, or more distant from their places of work.” This housing crisis has been well documented in Our County, as newspapers are

Comment [DM4]: result of research

replete with stories of families who have been forced to leave the Bay Area in search of housing. Others have no choice but to live in substandard and overcrowded conditions in a desperate attempt to avoid becoming homeless. The working poor and minorities are particularly affected.

Housing Element

California's Housing Element law provides the opportunity to encourage or force localities to meet their obligations to ensure that affordable and healthy housing is developed and maintained in their communities. The law requires each community to submit a 5-year plan that identifies housing needs in that community, including affordable housing needs, and to adopt goals and action plans for creating affordable housing. In addition, localities must assess how local laws encourage or discourage affordability and assess the conditions of their housing stock. They must also act to address identified barriers to affordability. The Housing Element planning process must include community group participation.

The cities of Fremont, Hayward, Alameda and Oakland are all at different stages of the Housing Element process and will require the development of about 5,891 units of affordable housing in the next five years. This creates an opportunity for community input and the development of housing elements that meet the communities' needs. If any locality fails to adopt a housing element or adopts an inadequate housing element, a court can order the local government to halt all development, including commercial development, until an adequate element is adopted. This provides significant legal leverage in obtaining localities' compliance with the housing element laws and in obtaining policies that ensure that necessary affordable housing will be developed and maintained.

We have a formidable team of legal and community advocates that will ensure compliance with the Housing Element law. The team includes ORGANIZATION A, B, C, D, Jane Important (an experienced disability rights advocate), and local advocates in each community.

Comment [DM5]: shows collaboration for results

ORGANIZATIONS B and C have organized community members to advocate for adoption of adequate housing elements in all four localities. ORGANIZATION A will join their advocacy efforts and provide the legal enforcement mechanism that should encourage the localities to adopt adequate elements. If the cities fail to adopt adequate housing elements, ORGANIZATION A and D will litigate against any non-complying city to force compliance. ORGANIZATION A's participation is required since D is a state support center that does not become involved unless local legal advocates are involved. Jane Important will provide the needed technical assistance on issues affecting housing for people with disabilities.

Comment [DM6]: unique role

Enforcing Local Ordinances that Protect Tenants

While Berkeley continues to be the only East Bay city that has a "good cause" eviction requirement, cities such as Oakland and Hayward have local ordinances that protect tenants and to some extent are intended to protect maintenance of affordable housing stock. These ordinances either limit rent increases, impose reporting, and/or other requirements. ORGANIZATION A will target enforcement of the Hayward and Oakland ordinances and will work together with community groups (e.g., Y and Z) who have long been organizing around these issues.

Code Enforcement

Our County has a serious and growing slum-housing problem¹ that produces serious consequences not only for those who live in the slum housing, but for all residents of Our County. The link between physical and mental health problems and uninhabitable housing conditions is well documented. The broader community is threatened by contagious diseases, bred in uninhabitable conditions, and transmitted in schools, restaurants and other public places. Slum housing also seriously compromises the sustainability and liveability of neighborhoods and communities.

Comment [DM7]: research

ORGANIZATION A will augment current community resources by enforcing code enforcement laws through litigation. Such litigation will improve housing conditions by acting as a deterrent for landlords who do not wish to take their obligations seriously. We will address potential displacement of tenants (caused by code enforcement) by creatively using community resources to rehabilitate affordable, uninhabitable, and unsafe housing. This will include working with community-based housing providers and government agencies that provide rehabilitation services or that would be interested in taking over slum properties. We will also work to enforce relocation ordinances and encourage cities to adopt relocation ordinances that will help address potential displacement problems.

ORGANIZATION A has been advocating for institutional policy changes with the Oakland code enforcement agency and would expand these efforts to other agencies to lead to a zero-tolerance stance for unhealthy and uninhabitable housing. Out of the 12,800 complaints it received last year, the City of Oakland processed only 55 of these cases as serious. This statistic, coupled with stories from other agencies and clients, point to the problem that code enforcement agencies are not doing their jobs. ORGANIZATION A's advocacy will force these agencies to effectively address slum housing.

Tenant Education and Outreach

Tenant education and outreach are key to accomplishing our goals, as we must educate tenants about their rights and give them the means to enforce the law. While this would not be the primary focus of our work, ORGANIZATION A would play an important role in this area. This is particularly true as it relates to outlying areas such as Hayward, Fremont and Livermore and immigrant communities where ORGANIZATION A has both a presence and contacts that other legal services lack.

The XYZ Foundation's grant would allow ORGANIZATION A and our partners to meet the goal of making Our County a community that provides affordable and habitable housing for all of its residents, including its most susceptible members — low-income and minority residents. The grant would partially pay for the attorney and be used to cover some expenses for our some of our housing element partners. Please contact me at 510-123-4567 if you have questions. I look forward to hearing from you.

Comment [DM8]: what the grant would specifically do

Sincerely,

Executive Director

¹ In 2000 the ABC Government Agency estimated the number of slum housing units to be 46,230.