

Swarthmore College
William J. Cooper Foundation
Guidelines for Preparing a Letter of Inquiry
Cooper and Promise Grants

Introduction

Thank you for your interest in applying for a grant from the William J. Cooper Foundation. The Cooper Committee is grateful for your interest and is eager to assist in both the preparation of your application and the ultimate success of your proposed event.

I. Purpose

In the 1920's William J. Cooper made a gift through his Will to Swarthmore College "in order that the Faculty, Students, and the College community may be broadened by a closer acquaintance with matters of world interest." Cooper specified his gift should be used "in bringing to the college eminent citizens of this and other countries who are leaders in statesmanship, education, the arts, sciences, learned professions, and business."

Some years later, on the occasion of his graduation, an alum anonymously established the Promise Fund to bring "guest speakers and performers in music, film, dance, and theatre that show promise of distinguished achievement."

Today the Cooper Committee awards grants from two distinct funds:

- A. COOPER GRANTS are made in support of topical events in a future academic year featuring guests who are eminent in their fields. Beginning this year, the Cooper Committee will not consider applications for Cooper Grants without a completed Letter of Inquiry submitted by February 3, 2023.
- B. PROMISE GRANTS are made in support of topical events in a future academic year featuring guests who show promise of distinguished achievement in their fields. Beginning this year, the Cooper Committee will not consider applications for Promise Grants without a completed Letter of Inquiry submitted by February 3, 2023.

If you are applying for Cooper Grant or Promise Grant, you must submit a short “Letter of Inquiry” (LOI) prior to completing the Application. The purpose of the LOI is to give each applicant the opportunity to give a brief, focused summary of the “why” of the event. Specifically, the Committee is interested in hearing from each applicant the topic or topics which the proposed event will enable the Swarthmore college community to engage with more broadly, and in what way or ways the proposed guest(s) are well suited to help our community do so. Upon acceptance of the LOI, the application will focus on the “what” of the event, including details on specific activities, space and technical needs, budget requirements, etc.

II. Criteria for Awards

Speakers or performers must meet criteria established by the donors of the respective funds. When reviewing applications the Committee considers the following:

- A. Does the topic or subject matter of the proposed event address an issue or issues of broad current interest, particularly where a speaker or performer from outside the campus community can help to broaden the community’s awareness and understanding of the issue(s)?
- B. Does the proposed event demonstrate breadth of appeal? Events likely to draw a campus-wide audience are preferred over more specialized programs.
- C. Does the proposed event allow for sustained interaction between the speakers/performers and the campus community?
- D. Will all aspects of the event be open to the wider campus community?
- E. Does the proposed event complement other types of events (e.g. symposia, lectures, performances) and other subject matter funded by Cooper, Promise, and Serendipity grants during the year?

III. Instructions for Questions on the Letter of Inquiry

A. Type of Application

Please indicate the type of application you are submitting and for which academic year. Indicate whether in your judgment the proposed guest more nearly matches the Cooper expectation for eminence or the Promise expectation for promise. This is not a make-or-break judgment; it simply helps the committee to make use of the appropriate funds when supporting the event.

B. Basic Information

1. Short title of event: provide a few words (less than ten) by which your event can be readily identified.
2. Type of event: select the name that most closely describes the type of event for which you intend to apply for funding. ***Please indicate whether your event is intended to be in person, hybrid, or virtual.***
3. Principal author of Letter of Inquiry: provide your name and email. If there is a better method for reaching you (e.g. telephone, text), feel free to provide that as well.
4. Your role at the college: Note that if you select "student" you must identify a faculty or staff adviser who agrees to work with you in the planning and production of the event, by meeting regularly and by assuring all final details are taken care of. You must provide the name and contact information for the adviser for your LOI to be considered.
5. Date of submission: indicate the date you submitted the completed LOI.

C. Topic(s) to be addressed:

Use two or three sentences to describe the event you envision. You might then touch upon one or more of the following questions, or others: Why is this event important to the education of our students or the welfare of our college community? What issue(s) will this event address? What insights will it offer into our understanding of what's at stake around this issue? What value will it add to other ongoing conversations around the issue? What would you tell prospective audience members about your event that would persuade them to attend? However you choose to tackle the question of the topic, keep in mind that the committee is looking not for analysis but focus. And please be concise. Your description should take no more than 250 words.

Here's a sample (about 230 words):

A PERIOD OF ANIMATE EXISTENCE (PAE) is a symphonic-theater hybrid for actors, musicians, and two generations of choirs. Created by Pig Iron Theatre Company, PAE presents children, elders, and machines contemplating the future in a time of dire ecological predictions. It is a work about life cycles, planetary cycles, and extinctions, performed in five movements and threaded together by Troy Herion's music. Today we find ourselves in a perilous time, one that is being called the "Sixth Extinction": an era in which we can foresee the loss of 20% to 50% of all living species on earth. Human activity has become the most significant force affecting many terrestrial systems.

This activity will leave such profound traces in the rocks themselves that geologists have proposed a new term for this epoch: The Anthropocene. Efforts to regulate human consumptive behavior have been slow and ineffective. The gravity of these issues has entered mainstream consciousness, affecting our politics, media, and ultimately our individual beliefs about the trajectory of life. PAE is Pig Iron's inquiry into this great disruption: How do we contemplate the future in such a moment? Rather than focusing on policy proposals, PAE considers the effort for life to go on living: the language that is used by one generation to address another; the difference between the animate and the inanimate; and the driving force behind technological revolutions.

- D. Eminence of guest(s) to be invited (also Indicate if you have contacted the guest(s), and possible dates for your event):

The committee looks to applicants to describe the eminence of proposed guests. After all, to give a single example, one of the world's most preeminent cognitive neuroscientists may be unknown to large numbers of our community. In response to this question, the committee urges applicants to focus on how the proposed guest is well-suited to help our community engage with the proposed topic through lecture, symposium, artistic performance, or other avenue. As with the discussion of topic in question 5, the committee is looking for focus and conciseness. Your description should take no more than 250 words.

Here's a sample (about 235 words):

A Period of Animate Existence (PAE) brings together a world-class assemblage of professional theater artists and musicians, alongside volunteer choirs of children, elders, and community members from Philadelphia. PAE's lead artists are composer/filmmaker Troy Herion, director Dan Rothenberg, and designer Mimi Lien. Herion has been commissioned by ensembles such as So Percussion and Crash Ensemble. His visual-music films Baroque Suite and New York: A City Symphony have been called "marvelous" by The New Yorker music critic Alex Ross, and were featured on MTV and performed with an orchestra at Carnegie Hall. Designer Mimi Lien is the first set designer to receive a Macarthur "Genius" Award. This season she designed Taylor Mac's 24-hour history of popular music at St. Ann's Warehouse, and her design for The Great Comet of 1812 transferred to Broadway. Her work has been recognized by numerous awards, including a Lucille Lortel Award, Hewes Design Award, and an OBIE Award for Sustained Excellence. New York based chamber orchestra Contemporaneous recently provided music for Martin Creed's show at the Park Avenue Armory. The ensemble has worked with artists as diverse as David Byrne, Donnacha Dennehy, Yotam Haber, Dawn Upshaw, and Julia Wolfe. Donald Nally's chorus The Crossing has received two ASCAP Awards for Adventurous Programming, a 2017 Grammy nomination, and has performed at Walt Disney Concert Hall, The Kennedy Center, and Carnegie Hall. Playwright Will Eno was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in Drama.

E. Faculty or Staff Advisor:

If you checked "student" under question 5, then you must identify a faculty or staff adviser who agrees to work with you in the planning and production of the event, by meeting regularly and by assuring all final details are taken care of. By identifying this adviser you affirm that you have discussed this LOI with the faculty or staff member and received their consent to serve in this capacity.

IV. Additional Resources:

Many colleagues on campus have knowledge and experience around making events successful. This knowledge ranges from dealing with the intricacies of securing travel visas for international guests to the layout of a promotional poster to finding the best possible flights at the lowest possible cost. A number of these colleagues are named in the Guidelines for Preparing an Application--but there are many more.

If you have a question about any aspect of your application, or are looking for where you might get additional help, contact a member of the Cooper Committee. We'll be happy to point you in the right direction to present an outstanding experience for the Swarthmore community.

V. Submitting the Letter of Inquiry

The Committee asks that all Letters of Inquiry be submitted electronically using the Google Form.

If you are experiencing difficulty accessing the Google Form or the Guidelines due to a disability, or if you have questions or concerns regarding the accessibility of any content related to the Letter of Inquiry, please contact Ali Danilak (adanila1) for assistance.

Ali can also be of assistance if you encounter any difficulty using the Google Form, or if you need to use another method to submit your LOI.