Contacting a Program Officer

PREPARING AN OUTREACH EMAIL

1. *Email Subject Line*. Carefully choose the email's subject line, giving the Program Officer some context to your message.
2. *Program* Note what program you are applying to (be as specific as possible, i.e., grant number, opportunity number, mechanism, or other available details).
3. *Title*. Include the title of your proposal if you have identified
4. *Request*: Construct 1-3 sentences for your request, g., “I would like to inquire as to the suitability of the proposed research to meeting your program’s objectives,” or “I believe my proposed research addresses Objective 1 of the program in that … I would like to confirm my understanding of the program objective.” In addition, describe the hypothesis you are proposing to test, so the PO has easy access to the context of your work.
5. *Proposed Project Summary*. Write 4-6 sentences summarizing your proposed project, including project objectives, approach, expected results, and how your research will contribute to the field.
6. *Your Background & Research Program*. Write 2-3 sentences providing your background and introducing your research program.
7. *Closing*. End with 1-2 closing sentences acknowledging the PO’s time and efforts and you’re looking forward to the PO’s Let the PO know you are available for follow-up and invite the PO to request any additional information.
8. *Contact Information*. Make sure your full contact information is provided in the

SAMPLE EMAIL TEXT

> “ Dear [add Program Officer/Contact name],
>
> My team will be seeking funding from the [Add specific program name and solicitation number] project [Add project title]. While our proposed research seems to meet the requirements listed in the program solicitation to be responsive, I would like to confirm that my project is a good fit for your program.
>
> Our proposed research will [Add summary of hypothesis(es), objectives, and NSF review criteria – intellectual merit and broader impacts].
>
> [Add 2-3 sentences providing your background (and co-I’s background] and introducing your research program [this is your career program, five-year goal, etc.)].

> Thank you for taking the time to address my inquiry as to the suitability of my proposed research to meeting your program's objectives. I look forward to your response and can provide any additional information you may need.
>
> Regards,

You should get a response within a day or two – study it for tone and nuance as well as its direct message. You might get a recommendation to contact a completely different program office. There might be hints about how to strengthen the proposal. Some Program Officers will ask to see a longer description of your project – usually a positive sign. If there is encouragement of any kind, go to the next step.

NEXT STEPS

PHONE MEETING

Once you receive a response to your email, say you would like to discuss some issues the Program Officer raised in the email. Ask if you can schedule a call within the next couple of weeks. If the Program Officer agrees to a meeting (and many will), you should prepare a short (1–2 pages) white paper and send it first.

Remember you are using this as an opportunity to obtain "between the lines" information to decide: a) whether to write a proposal for this program; and b) how to shape it in such a way to get a favorable review. In the course of the conversation, seek answers to the following:

- Does my project fall within your current priorities? If it does not, explore different objectives that might yield a better fit or ask for suggestions of other programs that might be interested in your project.
- What would you recommend to improve my chances for a favorable review?
- What is the anticipated proposal success ratio?
- Success ratios are your statistical odds for success. Rates are highly variable a mong grant programs, ranging from 5% to 40%, with most in the 10–20% range. First- time submissions have lower rates; resubmissions are
- What are some of the common reasons for proposal rejections? This will help you understand ikes and dislikes of review panels that do not show up in the program's written
- Throughout the discussion, listen carefully for helpful hints about proposal structure and content. Do you hear any "buying signals," e., signs that the Program Officer is intrigued by your idea? Conversely, be on the lookout for hints that the Program Officer does not think you have much of a chance.

FOLLOW UP

A short "thank you" note is more than good manners—it is a way to keep the line of communication open and fresh for both parties, especially if you summarize the key points you

heard in the conversation. It is also a good idea to note your desire to serve as a reviewer, and attach a one-page CV. Sponsor agencies seek to enhance the diversity of their panels, and some, will engage investigators before they write their first proposals.

RESOURCES

What to Say – and Not Say to Program Officers

Advice for Contacting your Program Officer

A View from the NIH Bridge: Perspectives of a Program Officer

Get a Speedy Response from your Program Officers (NIH)

Communicating with Program Officers

We don’t bite! Communicating with your Program Officers (NIH)

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