

TALK TO PROGRAM OFFICERS – EARLY AND OFTEN!

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Reading a Request for Proposals (RFP) or Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) and reviewing the portfolio of proposals funded in previous years will only get you so far in your understanding of what a sponsor is looking to fund. Having one (or more) conversations with a program officer during the proposal development stage can clarify any questions you might have in terms of content and/or process and could make your proposal even more competitive. Talking to the program officer after you have received feedback on a proposal might even be more important!

Here are a few tips for making sure that the conversation is on track:

Tips Before You Submit

1. Make sure that you know exactly what is required in terms of the program to which you are submitting.

A CONVERSATION WITH A PROGRAM OFFICER DURING THE PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT STAGE COULD MAKE YOUR PROPOSAL EVEN MORE COMPETITIVE.

2. Find out how much content program officers are willing to review. NIH program officers usually want to see just the specific aims page, IES program officers will provide feedback on the entire narrative, whereas NSF wants no more than a one-page overview.
3. Ask colleagues who have had experience with the institute or program and find out what worked for them when they talked to program officers.
4. Send the content to be reviewed as an attachment when you request a time to talk on the phone. Spend plenty of time on the one-pager (or more if allowed) to make sure that it tells a good story. Have colleagues provide feedback or join the EHE Grant Writing Group that meets every two weeks to have your content reviewed before you send it to the program officer.

5. Make sure that the email itself is short and to the point. Don't make the program officer scroll through paragraphs of explanation – include who you are, in what program you are interested, and possible times that you are available for a call. Short and sweet!
6. Have questions ready to ask the program officer. Check out the [EHE Wiki page](#) for ideas on the questions you might ask.

If You Didn't Get Funded Tips

1. Read the reviews (feelings of rejection will wash over you – you are only human), put them aside and read them again a few days later. Think about how competitive the proposal is in its current form. Did the proposal get a score or was it triaged (no panel discussion)?
2. Depending on the sponsor, the reviews can look very different. The individual reviewer comments are important but be sure to review the panel summary and the letter from program officer. What specific items did the program officer or panel mention in their overviews?
3. Schedule a time with the program officer to go over the comments. If there are multiple reviews, focus on the comments that you see mentioned on multiple reviews.
4. Ask the program officer whether they would like to see the proposal again or would there be another program where the proposal might be a better fit.

The EHE Office of Research staff are here to help you navigate submissions and resubmissions with all funders. If you are interested in the joining the grant writing group, need access to the EHE Wiki, or would like more information about our services, please contact [Kim Lightle](#), Assistant Dean for Research.