



Tuesday Tips is an outreach effort by OGCA. The idea behind *Tuesday Tips* is to convey tips, tricks and other helpful information around the area of research administration. Our goal is to post on (almost every) Tuesdays. If there is something you would like to see covered on *Tuesday Tips*, email: UAF-GCReATE@alaska.edu. For more Tips visit [OGCA website](#).

Guidance for Contacting your Program Officer or Equivalent

The program director (also referred to as program manager or program officer) is an excellent resource to understand various places you might be able to submit your work, if similar or related work has been funded by the agency (that you might then leverage), and to be sure you thoroughly understand the key points of the program. It is generally good practice to contact program manager(s) at the agencies you are likely to submit proposals early in your career, and generally also before each submission. You can usually find contact for the program managers on the agency website and/or the call for proposals.

New faculty or faculty working in areas new to them are advised to contact the program manager(s) in the agencies and divisions where they might apply for funding. It is generally easiest to send a brief introductory email and ask if there is a good time you could call (provide days and times that you would be available within the next 10 days) to discuss your research goals and which of their programs might be applicable.

When you have identified a specific program to which you are planning to apply, review the application guidelines for the grant program first and then prepare a short overview or summary of your project idea. If possible, send the overview to the program manager in advance so he/she can have a chance to read about your ideas before you meet or discuss over the phone. The phone conversation provides you an excellent opportunity to get substantial feedback on your ideas from the program director.

For example, you can:

- Briefly describe your project (and, if NSF, your broader impact) idea; then ask the program manager if it sounds like the sort of project the agency funds and where it best fits within the agency. Ask about each specific aim and its relevance to the mission. Discuss the level of your pilot data for feedback.
- Ask about shortcomings/problems the program manager has seen in proposals. What sorts of problems keep proposals from being funded? How can you avoid those problems?
- Ask the program manager if there are particular things you should make sure to include or address in a proposal to help it get funded (i.e., traits of successful proposals). Are there any areas/activities the agency would like to see represented in projects but which have been overlooked by other grantees?
- Read proposal guidelines, sample funded proposals, etc., *before your conversations* and ask about any matters that were unclear or puzzling. Confirm the funding priorities and check for any changes.
- Ask the program manager to describe the review and funding cycle for this solicitation/program announcement.
 - What role does the program manager play in the review process?
- Ask about the review process:
 - Who reviews the proposals?
 - How many people review the proposals?
 - How are reviewers chosen?
 - Can I suggest reviewers?

These are ideas of question you might ask but do your homework first. Read the solicitation, check out the website, and answer as many of these yourself as you can so that you can have a productive conversation. Few program managers will have the time to discuss off of this with a potential applicant.

They also cannot tell you how to write your proposal, or what your specific chances of funding are but it is appropriate to discuss what you are planning to submit, and any specific questions you might have about what does and does not fit in their program. Near the end of the conversation, ask them if there is anything I didn't ask that I should have?

This provides an opportunity for the program director/manager to provide unsolicited advice. For instance, if your project involves medical application, and you are interested in a National Science Foundation (NSF) project, making sure that the activities you are planning align with the funder is a good question for the program manager. It can also be very useful to discuss the relative weights of various parts of your research and how that fits with the goals of the overall program. For NSF CAREER proposals, for instance, the relative weights of time and funding for the research and education pieces can vary from discipline to discipline.

In general, contacting the program manager or funder gives you a chance to introduce yourself and establish a rapport. Making this connection in advance will often give you a very competitive edge, especially if the competition is close. Scientific conference and workshops, especially national meetings, are an excellent opportunity to meet and talk with your program manager. Make an effort to set up a time prior to travel to get together at the meeting.

If you are preparing a Department of Defense (DOD) proposal, it is *extremely important* to talk with the program manager, as they have significant influence in what projects are funded under their programs. Most DOE programs have a window of dates in which you can contact the program manager with questions, during which they can be very candid and forthcoming, and after which they will answer only the most basic of questions.

For additional Information visit the [Office of Grants and Contracts Administration](#)