Before preparing a proposal, Resource Development encourages project directors to contact the agency or foundation about your project idea. A conversation with a program officer has three purposes:

1. It introduces you as the project director
2. It helps you to learn whether your project idea matches the funding agency purposes
3. It provides an opportunity to get feedback on your project

Making the call...

Program officers are generally helpful and will provide invaluable insight on your project idea and the grant program. Here are a few tips on contacting the program officer before you submit a proposal.

What to do when you contact the program officer...

1. Be brief and to the point
2. Listen to the program officer
3. Be ready to state, “The goal of my project is...”
4. Ask for related materials from the funding agency that would be helpful (brochures, announcements, contacts, past successful applications)
5. If the meeting is in person, leave a short biography and your business card with the program officer

...And what NOT to do

1. Wait for the program officer to end the conversation
2. Talk to yourself about yourself from your own perspective
3. Start a 40-minute monologue or presentation about the project
4. Overwhelm the program officer with papers and the like if you are meeting in person
5. Explain to the program officer what you think the funding agency should fund
6. Force-fit your interests to the grant program objectives (and vice versa)
7. Repeat how great is your past work or upcoming proposal

When they say no

Although it is important to contact a program officer prior to proposal submission, it is equally important to contact them when a proposal has been declined for funding. Often the program officer attended the reviewers’ meeting and can provide constructive feedback from the proposal reviews and advice on how to improve your project. They may provide information on other funding sources or upcoming programs that may be a better fit for your project. Finally, it allows you to build a relationship with the program officer that shows long-term commitment to your project.

What to ask:

1. Can you explain the review process?
2. Can you tell me if there was a problem with the project idea or the proposal itself, or if you could not fund the project at this time?
3. Do you think the proposal clearly addressed the guidelines or should we make that case more strongly?
4. Would you recommend that we apply again? When is the next application cycle?
5. Do you have any suggestions to strengthen or project or our proposal?
6. What were the common characteristics of success proposals?
7. (If you did not receive reviewers’ comments) Is it possible to get reviewers’ comments?