**Communicating with Program Officers**

**CAREER Tip Sheet**

**Proposers are also encouraged to contact the appropriate NSF Program Officer when preparing a submission, as some programs do not accept CAREER proposals. Proposers are encouraged to communicate with the CAREER contact or cognizant Program Officer in the Division closest to their area of research to discuss the expectations and approaches that are most appropriate for that area (see** [**HERE**](https://www.nsf.gov/crssprgm/career/contacts.jsp) **for a list of CAREER contacts by division).**

**Why Contact a Program Officer?**

* Key to funding is building relationships
* Gain insight on agency’s current funding priorities – which can shift over time in-between published materials
* POs can assist with determining the correct track for a proposal
  + \*they know which of their agency counterparts (different programs) may have more flexibility with funding!
* Program officers are typically rotating employees within agencies and are your peers
* POs make the final decisions about funding for a program based on their entire portfolio taking multiple facets into consideration (such as institutional and geographic representation and PI diversity)

**How to Reach Out**

* Identify the correct point of contact for the funding program/mechanism you feel most closely matches the theme of your proposed work or nature of your question. Compare your plan to recently funded projects in that area to make sure your work will make a true contribution.
* Once you identify the correct contact, do not make a “cold call.” Do not contact program officers for questions easily answered through available means (ex: NSF policy guide and/or our campus research services)
* Craft a concise e-mail asking your specific questions; attach a brief or white paper, if necessary. In your message, you may request to make an appointment for a personal call. Read the response carefully, and “between the lines.”
* Follow up with a call to discuss the PO’s suggestions.
* Take advantage of professional meetings and conferences to grab the ear of an agency representative.

**Follow up**

* Be sure to send a “thank you.”
* Do not badger. Remember, you represent the institution every time you interact with the agency.
* Consider serving as a reviewer for the agency.
* If you are unsuccessful reaching a specific PO, don’t keep calling! Try another route of communication, a colleague in the same directorate or an administrative assistant, for example.