Questions You Might Ask a Program Director at a Funding Agency

A Program Director is a general title for a person who oversees a program and the progress of grants in his / her research portfolio at a funding agency or foundation. This person administers grant portfolios, sets priorities, advises researchers, and acts as an advocate for the discipline area. You should rely on a Program Director for application advice, perspective on your research, and confirmation that the agency will accept your application.

Before you contact a Program Director at a funding agency or foundation, read the funding opportunity to glean basic information and learn the Program Director’s identity. Develop a brief [1/2 page or so] synopsis of your project idea and methodology. Some of the questions below might be appropriate to ask if not addressed in the announcement.

GENERAL QUESTIONS:

1. Is the program staff of your funding agency available to discuss project ideas with persons considering submitting a proposal? Does the program staff review or critique proposals early if they are submitted early enough?

2. Our project seeks to address [brief synopsis of your project idea] by [briefly outline your planned activities]. Does your grant program fund projects of this nature?

3. What kinds of activities or services can be funded under this program? Personnel? Travel? Equipment? Indirect (F&A) costs? Are there any expenditures for which funding is not allowed, or are there limits on any category of spending?

4. Does the amount of cost-sharing or matching contributed by our organization or a third party affect the funding decision?

5. How much funding is available for funding new projects this year? What do you expect the average size of grant awards to be? Can successful projects receive continuation funding next year?

6. Do you know of related funding programs that may be appropriate for a project like ours? Is your funding agency planning to announce any programs in the near future that match our needs?

7. What is the most common mistake or flaw in proposals submitted to you?

8. Can I obtain a list of projects that have been funded in the past year under this program?

9. What criteria are applied to evaluate the proposals submitted to this program? How are funding decisions made? Do reviewers meet to discuss proposals? How are the reviewers selected?

10. How long does the evaluation of proposals usually take? If my project were funded, what is the earliest date the funding would be available?

11. Can you provide me with a copy of a successful proposal from your program or refer me to someone who is currently funded under your program? (Don’t be too pushy with this question, even though you are entitled to read any proposal funded with federal money. Most have to be requested through the Freedom of Information Act, which can take months.)