



Suggestions for Building a Positive Working Relationship with Federal Agency Points of Contact

This quick guide offers guidance on how organizations can effectively engage with federal agency points of contact (POCs), a key component of a broader strategy essential for grant success.

Building strong relationships with federal POCs can unlock valuable insights into funding opportunities, agency priorities and goals, provide constructive feedback and support, and facilitate ongoing technical assistance.

Developing Productive Partnerships with Federal Agencies

Publish Date

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Background

Establishing a strong relationship with a federal POC is more than a courtesy—it fosters a mutually beneficial partnership. Continuing open and proactive communication after funding is awarded strengthens grant management and builds trust.

Providing consistent updates on project progress, even beyond required reporting, reflects transparency, accountability, and appreciation for the agency’s support. Federal POCs value being kept informed about the initiatives they’ve invested in, reinforcing shared commitment to the project’s success.

Key Components

Building a positive working relationship with a federal POC involves intentional, strategic steps that foster trust, collaboration, and accountability. Key actions include:

1. Initiate Contact Early:

- Reach out promptly after the award notification and introduce yourself and your organization.
- Express appreciation and enthusiasm for the grant opportunity.
- Clarify preferred communication channels and frequency.

2. Establish Mutual Expectations:

- Confirm reporting requirements, deadlines, and formats.
- Discuss goals, timelines, and anticipated challenges.
- Invite feedback and input where appropriate.

3. Maintain Consistent Communication:

- Share regular updates—even if not required. Make sure to forward to them any social media or news articles on the project. In these articles, ensure that the funding agency is mentioned.
- Notify them proactively of delays or issues.
- Be timely and professional in all correspondence.

4. Demonstrate Accountability and Transparency:

- Share key milestones and outcomes as they unfold.
- Provide data and insights that reflect meaningful progress.
- Acknowledge challenges openly and show solutions.

5. Personalize the Relationship:

- Address them by name and reference past conversations. If they have shared family information or events, ask about these.
- Recognize their role in supporting your project's success.
- Be courteous and respectful in tone—always.

6. Invite Engagement:

- Offer site visits, event invitations, or participation in discussions.
- Ask if they'd like to be included in newsletters or impact stories.
- Encourage their involvement in public-facing aspects of your work.

7. Build Long-Term Trust:

- Document interactions and follow up consistently.
- Even if it is not required, it is always good to let them know about challenges and even minor budget revisions.
- Share lessons learned to improve future efforts.
- Express gratitude for their support, both formally and informally.

Case Study: The Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute studied partnerships between the U.S. Forest Service and Tribal Nations on the Eleven Point River (Missouri) and Fossil Creek (Arizona).

Relationship-Building Strategy:

- Regular, respectful communication between Forest Service staff and Tribal representatives.
- Joint planning sessions to align river management goals.
- Recognition of Tribal sovereignty and cultural values in decision-making.

Result: These efforts led to more inclusive and effective stewardship of wild and scenic rivers, highlighting the importance of trust, shared goals, and mutual respect

Understanding the Impact

Case Study: Nonprofit Partnering with the Department of Education

Scenario: A nonprofit receives a federal grant to support rural literacy programs.

Relationship-Building Strategy:

- The nonprofit sends quarterly impact reports with stories and data.
- They invite the federal POC to visit program sites and meet beneficiaries.
- They participate in federal listening sessions and provide constructive feedback.

Result: The POC views the nonprofit as a model grantee and recommends them for additional funding and pilot programs.

Establishing strong relationships with federal agency points of contact (POCs) has several important implications—both strategic and operational. These relationships can significantly influence the success of projects, compliance, and long-term collaboration.

- **Improved Communication and Responsiveness**

- **Implication:** Clearer, more frequent communication reduces misunderstandings and delays.
- **Benefit:** Faster resolution of issues, better alignment of expectations, and smoother project execution.

- **Increased Trust and Credibility**

- **Implication:** A trusted relationship can lead to more openness and flexibility from the agency.
- **Benefit:** POCs may advocate for your organization internally, offer early insights into opportunities, or provide additional technical assistance during minor compliance issues.

- **Enhanced Access to Opportunities**

- **Implication:** Agencies are more likely to share upcoming initiatives, pilot programs, or grant opportunities with trusted partners.
- **Benefit:** Competitive advantage in securing future contracts or funding.

- **Better Navigation of Bureaucracy**

- **Implication:** POCs can help you understand internal processes, timelines, and decision-makers.
- **Benefit:** Saves time and reduces frustration when dealing with complex federal systems and processes.

- **Stronger Compliance and Risk Management**

- **Implication:** Ongoing dialogue helps ensure you stay aligned with current and evolving regulations and expectations.
- **Benefit:** Reduces the risk of audit findings, penalties, or reputational damage.

- **Continuity Through Staff Changes**

- **Implication:** A well-maintained relationship ensures smoother transitions when agency personnel change.

Next Steps & Recommendations

- **Benefit:** Institutional knowledge is preserved, and momentum is maintained.

- **Influence on Policy and Program Design**

- **Implication:** Trusted partners may be invited to provide feedback on new policies or pilot programs.

Benefit: Opportunity to shape initiatives in ways that align with your mission or capabilities.

With your organization committed to building relationships with federal agency points of contact, the next step is implementation. The following are practical recommendations for initiating and sustaining a positive, productive relationship with the federal POC.

- 1. Conduct Thorough Background Research:**

- Understand the agency's mission, priorities, and recent initiatives.
- Review relevant regulations, past communications, and any public-facing materials.

- 2. Make a Strong First Impression:**

- Be professional, respectful, and prepared in your initial interactions. These can even occur before an application or award.
- Clearly articulate your goals, capabilities, and how you align with the agency's mission.

- 3. Establish Regular Communication:**

- Set up recurring check-ins or status updates, if possible.
- Use these meetings to share progress, ask questions, and clarify expectations.

- 4. Be Transparent and Proactive:**

- Flag issues early and offer solutions.
- Share both successes and setbacks honestly—POCs appreciate openness.

- 5. Document Everything:**

- Keep records of meetings, decisions, and action items. This helps maintain continuity, especially if agency staff changes.

- 6. Align with Their Goals:**

- Frame your work in terms of how it supports the agency's objectives.
- Show that you are a mission-driven partner, not just a vendor or grantee.

- 7. Show Appreciation and Respect:**

- Acknowledge the POC's support and responsiveness.
- Celebrate shared successes and milestones.




- 8. Be Consistent and Reliable:**

- Meet deadlines, follow through on commitments, and deliver quality work.
- Reliability builds trust over time.

Additional Resources

- Xie, Y. (2023). [Building trust in government through strategic communications](#). Partnership for Public Service
- [Leading Practices in Collaboration Across Government | U.S. GAO](#)
- Hernandez, M. (2024). [Building Strong Relationships with Funders from the Ground Up - Grant Professionals Association](#)
- Jarvis, M., & Pasquarello, C. (2022). What Makes Funder Collaboration Effective? Stanford Social Innovation Review. <https://doi.org/10.48558/XS19-Q769>

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