

Advice for Contacting People

Reaching out and contacting real people is a great way to get another perspective, gain information about an audience or about those you are trying to serve.

You will be contacting at least two people: an expert and someone who represents the audience for your project.

Realize that the information you gain may cause you to pivot or change your project in some way. This is to be expected but may seem hard at first. Flexibility is a strength to be cultivated.

Advice for Reaching Out:

- **Find and follow multiple avenues**
 - Individual People/ Agencies
 - Local/State/National
- **Do your homework before making contact.**
 - Google people or organizations.
 - What does the person or agency do? What is the relationship between their work and your project?
 - Whom do they serve?
 - Develop a sense of their perspective and level of expertise. Try to imagine the “frame” from which they look at the world.
 - Find out everything you can ahead of time, so you are not asking the person to explain the basics, when you make contact. This also communicates that you care and are respectful of their time.
 - Clarify what you are asking of the person. They are more likely to respond if your request is focused and clear.
- **Email is usually the best way to reach out.** Here is a possible format for an email. Please cc Ms. Knight and Ms. Morris/Ms. Macomber on your email.

Email Format
Explain who you are (name, grade, school).
Briefly explain your project.
If someone recommended you contact the person, mention that person’s name.
Share what you know already about the subject.
State what you are asking for, and give the person options for responding. (email exchange, in-person visit?, 15 minute phone call?)
Explain your time-frame. (Are you hoping to communicate by or on Thurs., Jan 19 or Fri. Jan. 20?)

Thank the person for considering helping you in some way.

A Sample Email for Reaching Out:

Dear Ms. Expert,

My name is Daisy Mawrtian, and I'm an 8th grade student at The Bryn Mawr School in Baltimore, Maryland. All 8th graders at my school take a seminar class, where we choose something that interests us and, "make something real for someone real." I'm working on a project about dead zones in the Chesapeake Bay. I've done some research online and have learned that this issue is a big problem, especially because of runoff from farming in the watershed. I'm interested in finding a way that I could contribute and help make a difference for the health of the Bay.

In my research, I found your name as an expert in this field. I'm wondering if I could contact you for a 15 minute phone call to ask you some questions about your work. I'm very interested in learning as much as I can, and I'd appreciate the opportunity to talk with you at a time that is convenient for you sometime in the next month.

Thank you for considering my request. I'm very interested in learning more about your field.

Sincerely,

Daisy Mawrtian

- **Keep track of your efforts to reach out with a [Contacts Chart](#).**
 - Be patient and persistent.
 - If you haven't had a response, wait at least a week before emailing again. People are busy. Don't take it personally if someone doesn't respond.
 - If the person can't help, can he or she suggest someone else to contact? Make note of additional leads.

Advice for the Interview (email, call or in-person) -

- Thank the person at the beginning of the interview.
- Be clear and prepared. Have questions or requests ready.
- Be open and flexible. What the person says or suggests may be different from what you expect.
 - Be careful to listen. (Don't spend the time when they are talking thinking about what you will say next.)
 - Take notes: The person may say something you don't completely understand. Notes will help you clarify. It will also let you go back and think more about what was said.
 - For interviewing the representative of your audience, listen carefully to the needs he or she expresses. These may be different from what you expect. You need to follow their requests and suggestions.
- Offer to share information about your final project, once it is complete.
- Thank the person again, at the end of the interview.
- Send an email thank you for their time and expertise.

Some Words of Wisdom:

- Reaching out and talking with adults can be hard to do, but with practice it gets easier.

- Generally people are very kind and want to help you, if they can. If someone isn't like that, move on.