

## Conference Proposal Tips

### Creating Proposals:

**Pick a Good Topic.** A winning proposal needs to address a topic that not only interests others, but especially you. What keeps you up at night? Other colleagues? What problems do you solve for your institution? What are 2-3 priorities for you this year? Are you trying something new this year? A good proposal starts with a compelling topic.

**Connect to Theme, Professional Competencies or Pressing Issues -** You must provide a clear rationale for why the topic is important and how it relates to the convention theme (if there is one) or competencies or any particular guidepost the organizers provide. Make sure that you provide clear, concise learning outcomes, and support them in your proposal.

While it may not strengthen your proposal/sessions many reviewers look for this connection and sometimes it is part of the rubric.

Review the proposal review criteria/rubric so you know how your proposal will be evaluated

Assume your reviewers know nothing about your topic. Often times you know more about your topic than your reviewers. Make sure you accurately explain what you will be doing otherwise the reviewers will make assumptions and incorrect assumptions may sink your proposal.

**Pick a Good Title.** A title should be informative and interesting to the lay audience. Some winning examples: "The A(ssessment) Team: We Pity the Fool who Doesn't Use Data"; "They're Just Not That Into You: Working with Disinterested Faculty"; and, "Developing and Implementing a Research-Based, Savvy, Student Affairs Strategic Plan."

**Develop an Effective Abstract.** Can you get my interest and make me concerned if I miss the program? The features of a good abstract are opening with a hook to generate interest, providing a brief and compelling context so reviewers and potential participants can get a truer sense of what you will cover, and the promise of concrete strategies that participants will be able to bring to their home campus in exchange for spending time with you. It is best to write this up after you have fleshed out your proposal so the abstract is elegant and exciting and grounded in what you will do if selected.

Write your abstract last rather than first. Often people start with a description but when they finish developing their proposal their content is different than their description. Stay true to your description since this is what others are using to decide to attend your session

Use specific examples and best practices in the proposal and subsequent presentation, but make it clear how those examples and best practices are generalizable to other institutions.

Make sure to note the intended audience. If it's an advanced presentation, say as much so you can set the expectation that beginners should probably choose another presentation. If an intended audience is not specified, I find that reviewers usually assume it's either a basic session or a general session, which doesn't always work in favor of the proposal.

Make sure to \*specifically\* indicate why your proposal is unique! This is especially true for the world of assessment in which every conference received about 50 presentations on objective writing and creating assessment buy-in. They'll obviously choose at least a few presentations on common topics like objective writing and buy-in, so be sure the reviewer knows why YOUR presentation is one of the ones to pick.

Writing Proposals:

Start with the outcomes for the session and build the session around those

Be clear about what participants will be able to do, know, or value after the session (And be realistic!)

Include an outline so reviewers know what you are doing.

Be clear and concise

Administrative details are crucial for a successful proposal. This includes following deadlines, making sure colleagues can review it with "fresh" eyes, and proofing your submission for completeness and typos. Organizers are serious about word counts (follow them!).

PROOFREAD. Spell check, make sure the ideas make sense and do not use lingo specific to your institution. Make sure you use spell check and leave out comments or track changes on your final draft.

Use headers/sections to help guide the reader - Speak to EVERY point outlined in the call for proposals. When proposals are reviewed, they are usually scored vis-a-vis the actual requirements in the call for proposals, so building a proposal that clearly and specifically speaks to every required aspect of the call for proposals will increase the likelihood of acceptance. Don't make the reviewer search for how your proposal fulfills the requirements of the CFP, make it 100% clear!

Why should every person present at a conference? There are five key reasons:

1. It will focus your energy for the year. There are always 2-3 priorities that will be a primary focus for the year and submitting a proposal will help clarify them for you. If you have an issue, odds are there are many colleagues with similar concerns.
2. You don't have to be an expert. An enormously helpful presentation can be one that identifies models of best practice and a frank sharing of how you have tried to implement any initiatives on your own campus.
3. It will develop you professionally. Submitting a program will develop key writing skills to find a central, compelling argument. You will also become more expert as you research models of good practice.
4. You will gain greater professional/institutional recognition. Presenting will let others with similar concerns know who you are. Additionally, your institution will be seen as a "place" that is addressing an area of concern.

5. Lastly, it is your professional obligation! Student affairs is truly a community of practice. We constantly utilize the experience of others and it is only fair to share our own lessons more widely.

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