



PRESENTATION PROPOSAL TIPS

Finding a topic or a focus

Think about a developing topic now that might become a timely topic in the future; what is your system, branch or department good at, or what can you teach with some degree of authority?

Conference Proposal Basics

- Proposal description
 - Is the description written clearly with sufficient detail?
 - Does it provide a proposed presentation outline?
 - Are the learning outcomes clear and actionable?
 - Does it offer content that is fresh: memorable ideas, methods, or resources?
 - Is the content relevant to libraries and library workers?
 - Does the proposal address the conference theme?

Formats for Proposed Programs

- Pre-Conference Workshop (half-day, 3 hour) - These hands-on sessions will be offered on Monday, October 18 or Tuesday, October 19 and will not be recorded. These sessions should be interactive and collaborative.
- Paired Presentation (15-20 minutes per presentation; 2 presentations per time slot) - Presentations will be paired (by the Programs Committee) with another presentation on a related topic during the same session.
- Presentation (30-45 minutes) - Session presented by an individual or a group.
- Panel Discussion (45 minutes) - Session featuring a moderator and 2-4 panelists discussing a particular topic.

Tips for Successful Conference Program Proposals

- Tip #1: You, too are an expert!
 - Presenting is about providing a forum for collaborative learning and the sharing of ideas
 - Be willing to put yourself out there, regardless of how long you've worked in libraries or what your title is
 - What if you want to talk about something that isn't exactly cutting edge? What if you have something else that you want to say? There's still a place for you to talk about what you know and what you're good at
 - Craft a proposal around a topic that you want to learn more about or that you have experience in, but that experience wasn't ideal
 - When you describe something that didn't go well, it can create an engaging and interesting discussion amongst the panelists and/or amongst the audience about how to avoid those same pitfalls in their library
- Tip #2: Do your homework!

- Take the time to do the research when submitting a conference proposal.
 - There's only so much space at any conference for programs, so do your homework to get a better sense of the “in demand” topics. Also bear in mind that if a topic is new for you, it doesn't necessarily mean it's new for everyone else.
 - When submitting your conference proposal, think about whether your topic meets these criteria: “Is this more of the same, or is this something new?”
 - Look at past conference program schedules (which are often found online, ex. [PLA 2020 Nashville](#) or [NCTE 2020](#) or [NCLA 2019](#)) to get a sense of whether your program topic has been presented before.
 - Review the professional literature: What are people talking about? What are the issues that the profession is grappling with? Is your topic novel and if so, do you think there's a need for it?
 - Focus: Find that thing that you want to learn more about.
 - What kind of a session are you interested in attending when you go to a conference? What sessions were you most excited about and what was it that excited you about those sessions?
 - What's something that you haven't heard before? Is there an idea or a perspective or a question that you've never seen addressed?
 - What are you passionate and excited about? Library conferences are a great place to get together with people who love the odd things that you love, too. So, it's a perfect place to share that passion with others!
 - Brainstorm: Use the “753 Method” to generate ideas and hone them down into a presentation topic (also a good tool for any kind of ideation)
 - Take 10 minutes and write down seven ideas
 - A focus area (see above), original idea, or something that you have been asked to talk about
 - Don't just write them: draw a picture, take a picture of it, make a little doodle. This is a “get it on paper so that you can move on to the next step” phase.
 - Take your seven ideas and create five new ones
 - Each one of the five needs to be a “twist” on those original seven ideas (combine multiple ones or narrow one down further for you iterate one)
 - Do the opposite of what you were originally thinking (in the example above, proposal on how you did something well, change the focus of that to help the audience to avoid the common pitfalls)
 - Narrow those five down to three
 - Bring in other people for this step (a supervisor, a colleague, a spouse, partner, friend, etc.) and listen to their perspectives and let them help you identify strengths and weaknesses of the five ideas to narrow them down to your top 3
- Tip #3: Sharpen it up!
 - Your topic needs to be specific, not just “pie in the sky, I'll figure it out”

- Start with your story, your knowledge, and your skills, and build on that; presentation should be 30% about you as a presenter and your experience and 70% about how people can use what you have shared.
- Description should clearly show a narrowed and focused presentation and demonstrate what participants are going to gain.
- Tip #4: Include multiple perspectives in your proposal
 - Consider inviting colleagues from your library or another library to present with you who can speak to a topic from a different perspective/position.
 - Consider presenting jointly with colleagues on similar initiatives in different locations/library types.
 - Consider putting together a panel discussion around a topic that reflects a range of experiences/library types/backgrounds, etc.
 - If presenting solo, consider how you can bring in other voices/perspectives.
 - If you're sharing about a community or collaborative project, consider inviting a non-librarian speaker who can share their perspective on the collaboration.
- Tip #5: Have a Plan B
 - If your proposal is rejected, it's not a rejection of you personally or even your idea
 - "Think outside the box" when seeking additional presentation opportunities
 - Poster sessions are still a possibility (for more information: https://nclaonline.org/conference#poster_proposals)
 - Staff training day or library and service day at your library or nearby library systems (same idea with library consortiums)
 - You may find a welcome audience at a conference for affiliated professionals such as school librarians or academic librarians, all of whom hold their own conferences
 - Another bonus is that any of these options would give you a chance to iron out the kinks in your presentation so that it will be stronger when you submit the proposal again

Why present? What's in it for you?

- It helps to get your name out there
 - Especially for public library staff who don't have tenure or faculty status
- It gives you credibility
 - You start to be viewed as a subject matter expert in [fill in the blank], which will lead to more opportunities for you
 - Opportunities to present at future conferences, and training events, serve on committees, or run for elected positions
- It allows you to "toot your own horn"
 - It's a "safe space" to brag about your accomplishments without being perceived as arrogant or self-serving
- It can give your career some momentum
 - This is essential if your career is on a leadership trajectory, or you don't plan on staying in the same position forever
 - Future positions: it makes you competitive and marketable and set you apart from those other candidates who have never engaged in similar activities
 - Demonstrates that you are playing an active and visible role within your organization and or profession

- The work you do is more than just a job or a paycheck
- You're tuned into the latest trends in libraries that you can translate into good ideas and innovative solutions
- You can articulate ideas in a public forum
- You have something to say that others want to hear and that you are worthy investment for any prospective employer
- It gives you a friendly venue for public speaking
 - If presenting solo is too intimidating, then consider inviting colleagues to join you on a panel presentation so that there's mutual support
 - Possessing soft skills and being able to speak publicly are common expectations
 - The more you do public speaking, the easier it becomes
- It allows you to give back
 - Librarians benefit from sharing ideas with each other; no good idea is ever trademarked or truly proprietary
 - If you love what you do and are being innovative in your library and in your community, please share your knowledge with others; this contributes to the collaborative culture of our profession

Questions about your presentation proposal? Contact the NCLA 2021 Conference Planning Committee at programs@nclaonline.org.

(Guidance included is excerpted from the webinar: "What Makes a Successful PLA Conference Proposal?"

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