

How to Arrange a Conference Proposal Workshop

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A Proposal Workshop is a meeting in which graduate students comment on one another's paper proposals for an upcoming Call for Papers. It is an opportunity to hear about the projects that other graduate students are engaged in, and to share and receive valuable proposal writing tips. Proposal Workshops are useful for beginners who are writing their first proposals, as well as seasoned presenters. All participants will benefit from having extra pairs of critical eyes on their work. These meetings are relatively simple to arrange, so don't miss another opportunity to build the academic community in your department through this simple exercise.

1. Identify the conferences in which graduate students in your department are interested in participating. Schedule your conference proposal workshop one or two weeks prior to the Call for Papers deadline. (Your department or campus library should be able to assist in securing a room for your approximately two hour meeting).
2. (Optional) Invite a faculty member, or a graduate student who has served on a committee for proposal selection for a conference, to attend your workshop and share tips on what they think distinguishes a successful proposal from a not so successful proposal.
3. Advertise your workshop through your department email list and by posting flyers in your department. Inviting your peers via a "Facebook Event" may also be effective. Indicate that the proposal workshop is for beginning *and* advanced proposers, and that participants should bring with them three or four copies of their proposal drafts and a willingness to read and comment on other proposals.
4. Be sure to bring any information regarding the Call for Papers to the proposal workshop for people to reference.
5. During the workshop, have your invited faculty member or graduate student begin by sharing tips on proposal writing. Next, go around the room and have students share a one-line description of their proposed papers, whether or not they've written the paper yet that they are proposing, and what they would like the reviewers to help them with. Next they will exchange their proposal drafts. Depending on how many students attend the workshop (this can work with as few as two participants), you may want students to read four or five different proposal drafts. Encourage them to write extensive comments on the proposals. It is also useful to discuss each proposal in the second half of the meeting, particularly focusing on what could be done to improve each proposal. (This is a great exercise for learning how to critique academic work without offending people.)
6. Don't forget to remind graduate students that proposals are accepted based on a number of criteria, including quality of the proposal, "fit" of the proposal with the goals of the conference or section that particular year, compatibility with other proposals submitted that year, and possibly how well the selection committee thinks your paper will draw a crowd. Just because one proposal is accepted and another is not does not mean that it was necessarily a better proposal.
7. If more than one person gets accepted to a conference, arrange practice presentations for them a week or two before the conference so that they can practice their delivery, receive feedback, and have an opportunity to share their work with those who will not be able to attend the conference.