Developing Competitive Conference Proposals

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Today’s Objectives

• Learn about conference calls for proposals;
• Identify the right conference session type for your project;
• Identify common components of conference proposals;
• Understand what reviewers are looking for; and
• Learn other tips to consider and pitfalls to avoid.
Why submit a conference proposal?

Presenting at a national conference allows you to:
• Share your expertise and knowledge
• Share practical ideas or research
• Share your perspective and story
• Gain feedback on your work
• Develop your presentation skills
• Collaborate with others
Where to start?

• Identify a conference you would like to attend
  • Look at conferences your faculty or colleagues attend
  • State conferences
  • National or International Professional Organizations

• Locate conference information and current or past calls for conference proposals

• Plan a timeline for proposal submission

• Prepare your submission in a document saved to your computer or online folder (separate from submission portal).
Conference Calls for Proposals

- Read these carefully
- Use them as a template for your proposal (copy and paste onto your working document)
- If reviewer guidelines or review rubrics are available, review and add to your proposal template
- Read examples
- *Note that most conferences use online portals for submission. Create an account for this portal early and look at the required components and format of how you will be submitting them.*
Types of Conference Sessions

- Poster sessions (great for first time presenters!)
- Breakout or Conference session
- Ignite or Specialized sessions
- Pre-conference workshops
- Panel presentations
- Conversation sessions
- Workshops

Read Calls for Proposals and past conference programs for types of sessions included.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Council for Exceptional Children</th>
<th>Conference on Research Innovations in Early Intervention (CRIEI)</th>
<th>National Association for the Education of Young Children</th>
<th>National Research Conference on Early Childhood (NRCEC)</th>
<th>Teacher Education Division (TED)</th>
<th>Zero to Three</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Call for proposals: Each April</td>
<td>Call for Proposals: September before</td>
<td>PIs each June</td>
<td>Call for Proposals: November before</td>
<td>Call for Proposals: Each June</td>
<td>Call for Proposals: Each December</td>
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<td>Call for Proposals: Winter (usually January)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Title of presentation</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Topic</td>
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<td>Type of session</td>
<td>Abstract</td>
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<td>Title</td>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>Abstract of session</td>
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<td>Presenters</td>
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<td>Primary Audience</td>
<td>Submission identifiers</td>
<td>Problem</td>
<td>Competency domain</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>Discussion Questions</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Complete contact information</td>
<td>Literature Review and Reference List</td>
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<td>Description (abstract)</td>
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<td>Description (abstract)</td>
<td>Abstract</td>
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<td>Opportunities for linkage and application</td>
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<td>Overview of each paper/poster</td>
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<td>Area</td>
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<td>Format or session</td>
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<td>Opportunities for linkage and application</td>
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<td>Session Outcomes</td>
<td>Summary (background, research/evidence base, session description)</td>
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<td>Expertise of presenters</td>
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<td>Opportunities for linkage and application</td>
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<td>Description of learning activities</td>
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Components for DEC Conference Proposals:

- Title (12 words)
- Conference App Summary (375 characters)
- Session Type (check box)
- Target Audience (check box)
- Content Level (check box)
- Age Level (check box)
- Strand (check box)
- DEC Recommended Practices (check box/drop down)
- Objectives (700 characters)
- Outcomes (700 characters)
- Relevance (700 characters)
- DEC Recommended Practices alignment (700 characters)
- Evidence base (700 characters)
- Presentation organization/adult learning methods (700 characters)

DEC Recommended Practices:

- Assessment
- Environment
- Family
- Instruction
- Leadership
- Team/Collaboration
- Transition

Learn more at dec-sped.org
This is your first opportunity to engage attendees and invite them to your session.

Title should be interesting or ‘catchy’ but also clear and descriptive.

Be mindful of word or character count (usually 12 words).

Consider connecting to conference or strand theme.

Some good examples:

All in the Family: Understanding the Role Grandparents Play in Caring for Children Under 5

Refugee Children with Special Needs: A Content Analysis of Recent Literature

A Meta-Analysis of Coaching Interventions to Improve Social, Emotional, and Behavior Outcomes

Parenting under fire: Supporting military families in challenging circumstances.

Where is Dad? Why does it matter? What we know about father involvement in EC special education.

Some titles that could be improved:

Inclusion in early childhood programs

Social Emotional Interventions for Children with ASD
• This is your second opportunity to engage your attendees
• Abstracts should be clear and descriptive
• Be mindful of word or character count—make the most of your space.
• Look up past conference programs and read included abstracts.
• Include:
  • Rational, relevance, and key takeaways of session
  • What type of information will be presented and what they will learn (i.e., research, practical tips, reflection)
  • What type of session or style of session attendees can expect (i.e., discussion, interaction, poster, action planning, make/take, practice skills).

Some Examples:

Collaboration between Part C and childcare professionals is vital to infants, toddlers, and families experiencing meaningful inclusion. Based on findings from an ongoing research project, this interactive session will discuss common barriers and strategies to successful collaboration for professionals, programs, and states including DEC and federal efforts to support collaboration.

This literature review examined professional development to help address challenging behaviors for early childhood students. The findings indicate that while coaching and performance feedback is successful in helping teachers manage students’ challenging behaviors, that the time allocation, dosage, and resources often impact the quality of early childhood coaching.
• Look carefully at call for proposal and include ALL required components.
• Be concise yet descriptive (again be mindful of word or character count). Use every word.
• In general, include relevance, background information and research-base for session, connection to conference/organization goals, implications for practice, research, and/or policy, and how you will engage attendees.

For DEC Proposals include:
• *Clearly stated learner outcomes or objectives for your session that are observable and measurable.*
• *How outcomes are relevant for young children and their families across a spectrum of diversity (e.g., ability, cultural, linguistic, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status) and/or professionals in the field (across disciplines and roles).*
• *The proposal should include explicit alignment to specific DEC Recommended Practices.*
• *Strong proposals will include a description of evidence of the effectiveness of the content or how the information presented adds to the research. Citations are not required for 2020.*
• *How the presentation is organized including adult learning methods that will be used to engage the audience.*
Description Tips

• Include introduction to topic and its relevance including clear connections to this specific conference or organization. Why does this session fit this conference?

• Brief literature review including current citations (if required).

• If research session—include method and findings

• If practical session—include description of strategies/practices that will be shared and research-based of practices included in session.

• What is exciting, innovative, or new about this topic? Why should this session be THE session selected?
Participant Outcomes

- Remember the scope of your proposed presentation.
- Consider in the format and time allowed—what are reasonable outcomes for attendees?
- Make objectives clear and measurable.

Verbs Useful for Stating Learning Outcomes

Knowledge
- define
- repeat
- record
- list
- recall
- name
- relate
- underline

Comprehension
- translate
- restate
- discuss
- apply
- interpret
- use

Application
- understand
- express
- explain
- demonstrate
- differentiate
- analyze

Analysis
- calculate
- experiment
- test
- compare
- contrast
- criticize

Synthesis
- compose
- plan
- propose
- design
- formulate

Evaluation
- judge
- appraise
- evaluate
- rate
- compare
- value

Score
- revise
- select
- choose
- assess
- estimate
- measure

Create
- construct
- form
- make
- create
- set up
- organize

Organize
- manage
- prepare
- organize
Other Potential Components

- Target audience
- Content level
- Age level
- Conference strand or focus
- Adult learning strategies
- Unidentified presenter biography
- Presenter CVs (usually shortened)

For DEC carefully select your strand.
- By Practitioners for Practitioners
- Family-Practitioner Collaboration
- International
- Policy
- Practice
- Professional Development
- Research

If you are a student, consider submitting to the student poster session.
What are reviewers looking for?

• **Content**
  - Addresses focus of conference/organization
  - Includes research/evidence base of topic (included citations, if required)
  - Explains how this presentation will ADD to the field
  - Is based on current research and policy
  - Discusses how presentation will engage attendees

• **Organization and Presentation**
  - Includes all components (copy call and use as template)
  - Uses proper grammar and writing

• **Relevance**
  - Should be important and timely
  - Demonstrates relevance across families, professionals, policymakers, and researchers across disciplines

• **Implications**
  - Identifies impact for practice, research, and policy

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**How is your presentation adding to the conference?**

Why should this proposal be chosen over all the other proposals (particularly on common topics)?

**Things to avoid:**

- Editing errors
- Inappropriate or outdated terminology
- For DEC—not meaningfully integrating RPs
- For other organizations—not aligning to their mission
- If research presentation—not including method
Prepare BEFORE the deadline

- Write proposal early and get feedback from others (if student, your advisor)
- Gather all components (authors’ membership numbers, contact information, CVs or biosketches)
- Be mindful of deadlines (including time cut-offs and time zones)
- Plan for technology or time issues (registering on system, forgetting passwords, power outages, weather events, personal events)
How to improve your proposals?

• Partner with people who have previously had accepted proposals
• Follow the call for proposals
• Volunteer as a reviewer (most conferences require you to be a member of the host organization)
• Keep submitting proposals
Thank you!

Good luck with your proposals!