This presentation is designed to help you polish your proposal following its drafting
• Will touch on many aspects we’ve already covered in previous presentations
• A brief recap of important items to remember
Goals for this session

Learn the importance of making a good first impression
Learn how to make key points of your proposal easy to identify
Learn how good figures can improve your proposal
Identify little things that make a big difference to reviewers and program officers
Learn what to do if your first proposal is not successful

• State Goals
Make a good first impression
The first page is very important—make sure it conveys competence and professionalism

Make some duplicate copies of the cover page before you fill anything in

Fill out a practice cover page in pencil; make sure you have the information requested in the correct blanks, that you have enough room, that everything is in good English

THEN complete the actual cover page

• Remember there are no 2nd chances for making a good 1st impression
• Make it count!
• First page of proposal conveys
  • Competence and
  • Professionalism
• Practice filling in forms
  • Fill in final copies of forms only when
    • You have corrected all mistakes on practice forms
    • You have all the information
Make sure the cover page is correct, complete, and neat

- All blanks are filled
- If a field does not apply to your proposal, insert N/A in that blank
- All signatures are provided

- Your cover page should be
  - Neat
  - Complete
  - Correct
- Leave no blanks
  - Reviewers and program officers will assume that you did not pay attention to the information
  - If the information does not apply to your proposal
    - Place N/A
If the RFP does not provide a cover page, make your own

Include these seven elements of information

- Create your own cover page
  - Only if the RFP does not provide one
- Make sure to include
  - Title of Project
  - Submitting Institutions
  - Principal Investigators
  - Funder
  - Reference Number
    - From your institution
      - (often times institutions have grants and contract offices that assign proposals reference numbers)
  - Date Submitted
  - Contact Person
    - In the case that the funder needs more information
The first thing a reviewer will probably look at is the title

What will he think about your proposal if your title is vague, confusing, in bad English?

Elaboration of an Improved Technology of Obtaining Heterogeneous Anti-Anthrax Immunoglobulin for Urgent Treatment and Prevention of Anthrax in Bacteriological Contamination of the Places of Distribution of the Troops, Firing Grounds and Inhabited Localities of Georgia*

*Actual title; I didn’t make this up

• The title
  • Most likely the first thing a reviewer will look at
• Your title must NOT be
  • Vague
  • Confusing
  • Stated in poor English
• Provide example in slide
Agencies often route proposals to reviewers based on the title

Titles that define a project clearly and accurately help program officers (POs) direct proposals to the most appropriate reviewers or review panel

Have a native English speaker review your title for appropriate word usage

**Development of Technology and Creation of Industrial Explosives on the Basis of Utilized Ammunition**

• The title may be used
  • To place your proposal in a group of proposals for review
  • To distribute your proposal to reviewers
• Make sure your proposal is distributed correctly
  • By having a title that accurately reflects your proposed work
• Have a native English speaker edit or proof-read

“Utilized” means “used” to a native English speaker. So to me, “utilized” ammunition would be ammunition that had already been used, i.e., exploded. So how in the world could somebody create industrial explosives using ammunition that had already been “used”? (How would they collect all the tiny little pieces?) I think what is meant here is that existing ammunition would be disassembled and the energetic materials recycled into industrial explosives, but that’s **not** what the title says. --cme
A good title is concise, descriptive, and interesting

Restrict the title to a maximum of 12 words—make it easy for the reviewer to remember it

Put key words first—capture the reviewer’s attention immediately

Avoid unfamiliar acronyms or abbreviations

Incorporate the importance of the problem you are addressing or the unique new features of your work

• A good title is
  • Concise
  • Descriptive
  • Interesting

• Title should be
  • No more than 12 words
  • Key words should be presented first

• To capture the reviewer’s attention
  • Avoid abbreviations and acronyms

• Incorporate the following
  • Importance of problem
  • New features of your work
Make titles short and memorable

Development of the Method for Characterization of the Samples, Containing Spontaneously Fissioning Radionuclides, by Measuring Fission Products Gamma-Radiation (for the System of NM Control and Accountability of the Federal State Unitarian Enterprise “PA”Mayak”)

New Radionuclide Characterization Method Based on Gamma Emission for Accountability of Fissile Materials

•Make it short and memorable!
•Provide example from slide
•Don’t lose the audience in the background noise!
  •Grab them with only the most important information

What’s wrong with the original title?
(1) It’s too long! Who could possibly remember this title?
(2) It contains too many content-less words at the beginning that don’t tell the reader anything; you don’t get to “radionuclides” or “gamma radiation” until the third and fourth lines!
(3) Not everyone will know what “NM” stands for; I’d guess it is “nuclear materials,” but it is not a standard abbreviation in the Western literature. How is a reader going to know the importance of this project if he doesn’t realize NM stands for nuclear materials?
(4) The use of “Unitarian” in this context would confuse most Americans; to us, a Unitarian is a member of a Protestant religious denomination. Have your international collaborators or a native English speaker review your title.

The new title has several significant advantages:
(1) The first thing conveyed to a reviewer is that this is something NEW!
(2) The title incorporates the method that will be used, to aid in routing it to the proper program officer and appropriate reviewers
(3) The title calls attention to why the project is important—it’s a new tool that will aid in accounting for fissile materials
Put keywords FIRST

Investigation and Development of Effective Means of Increase of Nuclear and Radiation Safety of Nuclear Plants

Improving Safety at Nuclear Power Plants

Remember this guy? Look at your proposal through his eyes!

• Put keywords first
• Provide example from slide
• Your reviewers will appreciate a succinct message about your proposal
Don’t use acronyms or abbreviations without defining them

Development of the Technological Basis for Serial Production of CCDTL Structures in the Energy Range of 40-100 MeV for the SPL Project. Feasibility Study of Effective Application of Normal Conducting CCL Structures in the Energy Range of 100-180 MeV

After considerable looking, I found out that “SPL” probably stands for “superconducting proton linac,” “CCL” stands for “coupled cavity linac” and “CCDTL” stands for “cell coupled drift tube linac,” but by then I was too tired of this title to fix it—cme

• Don’t use acronyms or abbreviations without defining them
• You will confuse the reviewers
• Provide example from slide
Make it easy to identify the important features of your project

Position important points strategically—at the beginning or the end of a section; don’t bury your strongest arguments in the middle of the narrative

Use graphical highlighting (**boldface** or *italic*) to emphasize key points

Use bulleted lists, figures, and tables for emphasis (the reviewer will think about that important point twice—once when he reads it in the text and again when he looks at the figure or table)

• Important features of your proposal
  • Should be easy to find
  • Organize with the reader in mind
    • Use headings and subheadings to guide the reader and reveal the logical organization
    • Use **boldface** or *italics* for emphasis
  • Use bulleted lists and figures
Avoid excessive use of jargon* and abbreviations

“We will study the MLC2 Ser-18-Ala Nyquist B-process at pCas 7.5–5.5 +/- MLCK…”

Even if the reviewer understands what you’re talking about, he will not be your friend

*Russian jargon ≠ English jargon

• Will the reviewers understand your jargon?
  • Probably not
    • Considering the language differences
• Do not try to impress reviewers with over-use of
  • Jargon
  • Acronyms
People look at pictures first—work hard on your figures and captions

Use the captions to point out important features of the figure; tell the reviewer what to look at and why it is significant

Make your figures exciting and visually interesting—give the reviewer something positive to remember

• Utilize figures to your advantage
• Pictures should be
  • Significant
  • Relevant
  • Interesting
• Give your reviewer something to remember visually
• Both axes must be labeled on graphs and units of measure must be indicated.
• Figures must be accompanied by a caption placed below the figure that explains what the figure is about; labeling a figure with just the figure number is not sufficient.
Every figure must be discussed in the text

Use figures to emphasize your main points; the reviewer will have to process them twice—once when he reads the text and once when he looks at the figure.

Position your figures after they are first mentioned in the text, and preferably on the same page.

Don’t make the reviewer hunt through your proposal to find the figures.

• Figures must be “called out” in the text; i.e., do not place a figure in your proposal that is not mentioned specifically and discussed in the narrative text.

• Arrange your figures on the pages close to where they are discussed in the text, so the reader doesn’t have to flip back and forth between pages, interrupting his attention and losing his place in the narrative.

• Present figures in the order they are first discussed in the text.
Use this “test” to assess your figs

Grabs the reviewer’s attention in <10 s
Overall “message” is understood in <30 s
Caption points out important features
General message is clear to a non-specialist
Presentation is logical; e.g., a flow chart has clear beginning and end points
Conveys something the reviewer wants to see or needs to know
“Stands alone”; it is understandable without referring to the text
Is visually interesting and memorable

0–2 pts  Get rid of figure—it will hurt you more than help you
3–4 pts  Major revisions needed
5–6 pts  Marginally useful; upgrade if possible
7 pts    Usable
8 pts    Will definitely help your proposal

• Use this 8-point test
  • To determine whether you should use a figure
    • 1) Grabs attention in <10 sec.
    • 2) Message conveyed in <30 sec.
    • 3) Captions identify important features
    • 4) General message clear to non-specialist
    • 5) Presentation is logical
    • 6) Conveys need-to-know information
    • 7) Stands alone
    • 8) Visually interesting

• If you answer yes to each of the questions
  • Give yourself 1 point

• Follow the point scale to determine the
  • Usage or improvement needed of the figure
Use color cautiously in figures

Your proposal may be photocopied (and thus reduced to black and white) for the review copies. If you refer to the “red line” in your figure caption, will the reviewer know which line you mean?

If you use color to convey data, that information will be lost in a photocopy

• Beware of color figures
  • Your proposal may be photocopied for review
• Color may be lost in a photocopy
• In this example, the figure on the left clearly conveys a temperature gradient; when the figure is converted to black and white, the information that these data represent a temperature gradient is lost.
Consider the appearance of the text on the page

Arrange page breaks so that the text is not interrupted in awkward places

Number all pages

Use a header to identify all pages as belonging to your proposal

Genome Analysis of Cereal Crops, C.M. Elliott

Check every copy for legibility and completeness if multiple copies are required

• Check your typesetting
• Check your font
• Is your proposal laid out correctly?
• If allowed, a header on each page subliminally reminds the reviewer of your name and the title of your project every time he/she turns the page.
Little things can make a **BIG** difference . . .

Use your spell-checker faithfully

**Triple-check your math**
- In your budget
- In equations in the technical description
- In your page counts

**Use an easy-to-read serif font, at least 11- or 12-point**

Chk—Chk—**Check your work!**

- Check your spelling
- Triple check your calculations
Make a checklist to ensure that the instructions have been followed exactly:

- Is the objective clearly and persuasively stated?
- Is the scope of the project reasonable?
- Is the technical narrative scientifically sound?
- Has enough detail been provided to allow reviewers to evaluate the project?
- Are all required parts of the proposal included?
- Have all needed signatures been provided?

• Follow this checklist for a final check:
  • Is the objective
    • Clear?
    • Persuasive?
  • Scope reasonable:
    • Can you succeed at what you are proposing to do, with the resources you are requesting?
  • Technical narrative sound?
  • Provide enough detail?
  • All components complete?
  • Were signatures required?
Some RFPs provide a checklist—use it!

**Checklist of Documents Required for Proposal Submission:**
- Cover Sheet (Form A)
- Abstract
- Project Narrative
- Curriculum Vitae
- Budget (Form B)
- Budget Narrative
- FSU Personnel Data (Form C)
- Statement of Other Support (Form D)

…from the RFP for the Cooperative Grants Program of the Civilian Research and Development Foundation

• Use provided checklists too from RFPs!
Make a friend of your program officer (PO)

The PO is most familiar with what the agency’s current goals and interests are; don’t guess about this vitally important information—ASK!

The PO can provide insights on the reviews of your proposal and can suggest changes that are needed

The PO knows what approaches are most appropriate for a given research area

- Contact your program officer
  - Do you have any questions?
    - Don’t be afraid to ask
      - It is their job to answer your questions
If your proposal fails . . .

Ask for copies of the reviewers’ comments; consider them carefully and objectively
Find out what kinds of projects were funded
Talk to the PO about resubmitting
Investigate other funding agencies who might be interested in your project
Revise it, taking into account the reviewers’ criticisms, and submit it again, or—
Realize that there is no “market” for the project and move on

• If you are unsuccessful
  • Request copies of evaluations
  • Request list of funded proposals
  • Request re-submission procedures
  • Investigate other agencies
    • Don’t put all your eggs in one basket!
  • Revise it
    • Using critical feedback of reviewers
    • And resubmit
  • Assess whether the program is appropriate for your proposal
Let’s review what we’ve learned…

✓ You don’t get a second chance to make a good first impression

✓ Make the key points easy to identify

✓ Illustrate your proposal with interesting, attention-catching figures that supplement and clarify the text

✓ Avoid little mistakes that make a big bad impression

✓ If your proposal doesn’t succeed the first time, don’t give up

• Review list of items