

Abstract and Proposal Tips

(with thanks to a veteran reviewer)

1. **Review before submitting:** have somebody outside the proposing team read the submission for clarity, grammar, logic, and completeness. In many cases, a professional proposal writer can make an unacceptable abstract viable.
2. **Follow instructions:** too many submissions come in with major deviations from the requested organizational structure. Also, be sure to include all required components.
3. **Appropriate graphics:** pictures/graphics are helpful (and needed in most cases), but don't overdo it - and PLEASE don't include items with higher resolution than required to convey the information.
4. **Budget detail:** even in the abstract stage, most proposals fail to provide sufficient budget detail. At least break out equipment, labor, and overhead, by task. If billing rates, overhead rates, or fees are high, a sentence or two of justification will improve a reviewer's understanding of the proposed budget. Remember, most reviewers equate "rough order of magnitude estimates" with "guess".
5. **Realistic scope of work:** DON'T propose to do more than is feasible and realistic. A common problem is submissions with too ambitious a scope of work.
6. **Schedule detail:** provide as much schedule detail as possible. Gantt charts are very helpful and can be done in a minimum of precious abstract/proposal space. Unrealistic schedules are often easy to spot and reject.
7. **Obey the Law:** don't defy the laws of physics - you're wasting everyone's time. Perpetual motion, free energy, lack of reciprocity, and so forth appear all too often. Innovate but don't hallucinate.
8. **Collaborate:** team with others who have the expertise you may lack; don't propose to develop everything yourself if it's not within your capabilities. Collaborative proposals are always more attractive than very similar ones from a single organization with limited capabilities. Commercial and academic collaboration is almost always appealing.
9. **Share:** even vertically integrated companies have weaknesses. Don't try to keep everything in house!
10. **Describe benefits:** lack of any discernible regional or local participation or residual benefit is a common shortcoming of submissions. Token inclusion of a local company (or ZIP code) to establish the appearance of a local connection is often worse than no local presence at all.
11. **Be specific:** Don't generalize about the technical problem and how the effort will address maritime military needs or CEROS program goals. Be specific: describe jobs created rather than "economic growth", explain how "increased efficiency" will be achieved, and provide performance metrics for evaluating "effectiveness" of your results. Don't waste space on obvious generalities.
12. **Equipment purchases:** don't ask CEROS to fund large equipment purchases.
13. **Smaller is better:** recently, too many submissions had budgets near (or over) the \$1M limit and fewer in the small to mid-range. Large \$\$ requests are particularly difficult to entertain from small or startup companies. If the project is really that big, consider collaborating with others, or maybe breaking the effort into several separate proposals.
14. **Explain follow-on requests:** if you propose a multi-year effort, be very clear to spell out the results required from the first year in order to proceed to the second. And don't bother to submit the second year if you fail to achieve your first year goals.