



Association of Leadership Educators Tips for Writing an Effective ALE Conference Proposal

The following is a guide to writing an effective ALE conference proposal, offering tips and suggestions to authors. This document should not be considered as a replacement to the Call for Proposals (CFP). Submissions should follow the specified formatting and guidelines for each presentation track located in the CFP. Proposals will not be evaluated using these guidelines; please refer to the CFP for evaluation rubrics.

A typical conference proposal contains an abstract, introduction and/or literature review, description of the practice/methods, outcomes/results, analysis/discussion, and reflections/recommendations. It is important to note, however, that not all tracks of proposals include all of the aforementioned sections, and some may require additional information. For example, an educator workshop requires a detailed lesson plan outline, whereas research and innovative practice papers do not. The same can be said for roundtable discussions, which include a section for discussion questions, but do not contain reflections/recommendations. Be sure to refer to each track's call for proposal guidelines before submitting your proposal.

Section of Paper

Abstract
Introduction/Literature Review
Description of Practice/Methods
Outcomes/Results
Analysis/Discussion
Reflections/Recommendations

Process

Summary of what you did.
What is/was the problem?
How did you address the problem?
What did you find out?
What does it mean?
What do you do now?

Time Limits

It is important to acknowledge the time limit of the type of presentation while you are preparing your proposal, and tailor your proposal accordingly. Propose something you can reasonably present in the allotted time frame. For example, you can't compress your entire dissertation or monograph into one conference presentation. A focused proposal will lead to a focused paper.

If your paper is not based on a dissertation chapter or article, you may not have written your paper by the time you write your proposal. This is actually an advantage. Go ahead and write the paper you can present. If you've written a thirty page seminar paper, you cannot present the whole thing (not even if you read it very quickly). If you are presenting from a larger paper, you will need to make appropriate revisions in advance. The moment when you are writing your proposal is a good time to begin. Focus on the key parts of the argument. Select your strongest evidence to explore more fully, and allude briefly to the rest. Make it smooth. Having a manageable topic that fits the allotted time will let you have a more professional and memorable presentation.

Refer below for the time allotments for each track at the ALE annual conference.

Track	Time Limit
Research Paper	30 minutes (25 presentation; 5 for questions)
Innovative Practice Paper	30 minutes (25 presentation; 5 for questions)
Educator Workshop	90 minutes (structure via individual Lesson Plan)
Roundtable Discussion	45 minutes
Poster Session	Full session lasts 2 hours

Choosing a Title

The title is your first opportunity to invite a reader to your program. An effective title encourages readers to review the session description; a poorly written title can cause the reader to dismiss the session altogether.

Your title should be specific enough that proposal reviewers, and eventually conference attendees consulting the program book, know what you'll be discussing. "Leadership Development" is not sufficiently descriptive. Neither is "Leadership in College." As with the proposal itself, strive for a happy medium between big picture and specific focus.

If appropriate, a title

- Identifies the scope, sequence and/or level of the program content
- Identifies sponsors or specific group presenting
- Identifies potential target audiences

Writing Tips

- Keep short, specific, and clear (100-150 characters, including spaces)
- Introduces and captivates the reader
- Create the title *after* you have written the paper and the abstract

Writing the Abstract

The abstract is a brief description of your paper/presentation that provides the reader with an accurate picture of what the paper will cover. It will be included in the conference schedule online and in hard-copy.

Well-written abstracts identify the purpose and intent of the paper, are concise, organized and specific. Additionally, effective abstracts begin with the most important information or thought. Defining unfamiliar abbreviations and acronyms is helpful to the reader.

If appropriate, an effective abstract

- Summarizes the content and activities of the presentation
- Explains instruments or other research or technology tools
- Designates the scope, sequence and/or level of the program content
- Provides a "preview" of results/recommendations

Writing Tips

- Capture the attention of the reader

- Preview the content
- Clarify the contribution of the topic to the field
- Allude to the benefits of the program content
- Under 550 characters (including spaces)
- Write the abstract *after* you have written the paper

Introduction and/or Review of Literature/Related Scholarship

In this section, you should provide an introductory look at the content of the paper/presentation. Program reviewers rely on a well-written introduction to enhance their understanding of the content and goals of the paper/presentation. Regardless of whether you are reporting on a new and innovative practice or research, *explain why your paper is an important scholarly contribution to the field*. The point of conference papers – indeed the point of scholarship – is to move the discussion forward. You must explain why your proposed paper has broad significance to larger debates in your field but be sure to spend *at least one substantial paragraph* outlining your *original* contribution. Which thinkers? Which texts? Which countries, which years, which cities, which methods, which questions?

Everything we do as leadership educators has a foundation. Even if you have created a new and innovative program, it is likely supported by previously defined theories, concepts, or models. As you outline your paper, you should refer to the existing literature or demonstrate that you are familiar with it. You don't have to rehash the contributions of every single author who's written on your topic. But be sure you have read them. Be sure you're not plodding clumsily along a well-defined path – especially not holding a flag and attempting to claim new territory (or, conversely, stumbling blindly through the wilderness unaware that others have, for sound reasons, marked your chosen path as prone to rockslides). Just because an insight is new to you doesn't mean it's new to the people reading your proposal – and it won't necessarily be new to your audience.

Your goal is to be understood by your colleagues. Tell them exactly what you plan to argue/present in one thesis/topic sentence. (If you cannot sum up the point of your proposed paper in one sentence, that is an indication that you need to scale back your project to fit the limitations of a conference presentation). Then tell them exactly how you plan to support that point.

Overall, a literature review should do these things:

- be organized around and related directly to the thesis or research question you are developing
- synthesize results into a summary of what is and is not known
- identify areas of controversy in the literature
- formulate questions that need further research

Description of the Practice/Methods

If conducting scholarly research, this section would be focused on your method of research, whether it be qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods. It should be clear and concise. The methods section should describe what was done to answer the research question, describe how it was done, justify the experimental design, and explain how the results were analyzed.

Sub-sections typically include:

- information about the participants
- research procedure

- the instrument or measures used
- method(s) of data analysis

When presenting an innovative practice, program, assignment, etc., however, you should include a detailed description about the various components of the practice or program.

Sub-sections might include:

- mission/vision of the practice
- proposed learning outcomes
- details regarding the components of the practice (e.g. marketing, recruitment, student population or participants demographics, etc.)
- discussion of assessment measures

Outcomes/Results and/or Discussion/Analysis

Whether you are writing about research or practice, you should showcase your results to date, and discuss what they mean. Reporting results can be done separately from a discussion or analysis or they can be blended together.

Results shared should be relevant to the question(s) or outcome(s) presented in the introduction. You can present results in the form of text, figures, tables, or graphs. Be sure this section is clear, concise, and simple. Address whether your results agree with previous work or not, and any questions that may not have been answered or outcomes not reached.

Reflection/Recommendations

Reflection or recommendation sections exist to allow the author time to discuss implications of his/her research or the impact of his/her practice. In addition, address what you have learned, how it contributes to the field, and what you may change should you perform this research or develop the practice from the beginning again. Hindsight is 20/20. Furthermore, use this section to advise future scholars and practitioners who may want to replicate the research or practice in their own organizations. What do you suggest they do to prepare for the research or practice? What should they be aware of when replicating the work?

Appendices

Most proposals allow room supporting materials. If discussing research, this is an area for large tables/figures or instruments; if discussing an innovative practice, examples of assignments or documentation used while performing the practice. At the same time, educational workshops are encouraged to include examples of handouts they may provide attendees. Be sure to refer the guidelines for each track in the call for proposals, as each track specifies a maximum number of pages in which supporting materials can be included.

The document was adapted from:

[*Program Submission Guidelines*](#) by NASPA Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education

[*Writing a Successful Conference Paper Proposal*](#) by Kecia Ali, Boston University

[*Writing a Great Conference Proposal*](#) by Kathy Steele, MN, CS & Catherine Classen, PhD,
International Society for the Study of Trauma and Dissociation

[*The Literature Review: A Few Tips On Conducting It*](#) by Dena Taylor, Health Sciences Writing Centre,
University of Toronto