Russ’ Unofficial ABA International Program Proposal Tips:

Generally speaking, the easier it is for the program reviewers and meeting co-chairs to understand your program proposal, the better the chance your proposal has of being accepted.

**Title:** The title to your program proposal should follow what I call the “3Cs:” Catchy-Clear-Concise. “Canny” means that the title should immediately grab a reader’s attention just like a newspaper headline. “Clear” means that the reader should understand immediately what your program is about. “Concise” means that your title shouldn’t be so long that the title is its own paragraph.

**Track(s):** The tracks vary from meeting to meeting somewhat, but try to make sure that your proposal is appropriate for the track you select. It’s not the end of the world if it’s not, but it helps your cause. Also, it may be helpful if your program will fit into more than one track because that may indicate the possibility of increased attendance by attendees interested in different tracks.

**Contact Information:** For Program Chairs and Sponsoring Committees, please make sure you have contact information (e-mail & phone #) for the Co-Chairs or Vice-Chairs of the committees who sponsor your program proposal.

**Sponsoring Committee(s):** Section policy requires you to have at least one Section Committee to sponsor your program proposal. Please do not just pluck someone’s name off of a Committee webpage and say that there’s your sponsor. Few things are more embarrassing than seeing your name and committee as a sponsor of a program proposal when no one’s bothered to take the few moments to e-mail the committee chair and ask for a sponsorship (two of the Meeting Co-Chairs found their names on program proposals for which they were never contacted about prior to submission). Again, please also make sure you have contact information for the committee co-chairs. Solicit as many committees as possible to sponsor your proposal, especially across the different divisions. Again, one of the things the co-chairs are looking at is whether or not your proposal is likely to “fill the room.” One indicator of that is multiple committee sponsorship, so I again would strongly encourage you to get as many relevant committees (N.B., think geographic as well as substantive) as possible to co-sponsor your program proposal.

**Speakers:** If you have speakers identified for your program, then please extend invitations to them to speak in your program, but also make it very, very clear to them that the invitation is subject to the program’s acceptance (i.e., they should book flights or hotel rooms just yet). Also, please make sure your invited speakers understand that if your program proposal is accepted, then you expect them to be able to speak, subject to the usual issues (i.e., last minute schedule changes, etc.). Please make sure to identify the speaker not only by name, but also by employer name, and by geographic location (City, Country). You are generally better off with a full slate of invited speakers than you are with a blank slate. If you don’t have speakers, then I strongly suggest you reach out to the appropriate committee(s) leadership, share your proposal with them, and inquire as to suggestions for speakers. Also, if you have a panel full of what are termed “pie in the sky” speakers (e.g., you put President Obama on your panel), then you should succinctly, but with detail, explain how it is you expect to get such an ultra-high profile speaker to speak.

**Target Audience:** It is helpful, especially if your topic is narrow or not widely known, to identify your target audience with some specificity.
**Program Description v. Narrative Description:** For both descriptions, you should write as though your audience knows nothing about the topic and why it’s important. Writing this way is mainly for the benefit of those reviewing your proposal— if they do not practice in the area covered by your proposal, then they may not understand why it’s important, much less what your proposal is about, and may therefore reject it on that basis. The Program Description should go into some depth, *but not too much depth*, about your program (*i.e.*, a few paragraphs, but not a few pages) while your Narrative Description should say, in no more than 150 words, why someone *must* attend your program.

**A couple of other things:**

Law students are welcome to submit programs. However, it would be advisable that a professor or practitioner co-chair the program proposal with the student.

If you would like input from a committee’s leadership, then please allow enough time for the committee leadership to review your proposal, make suggestions, and for you to implement those suggestions before you turn in your proposal for consideration.

Following these are not guarantees that your program proposal will be accepted. Generally, for every program slot at a seasonal meeting, there are three program proposals, which means 2/3 of all program proposals will be rejected. Moreover, selecting programs for a seasonal meeting is as much art as it is science, so what may have gotten a proposal selected for one seasonal meeting may get it rejected for a different seasonal meeting.

If your proposal is rejected, then don’t despair— you may just need to resubmit it for a future meeting, or perhaps present it outside of a seasonal meeting.

In accordance with Section policy, and this is in the instructions, I believe, speakers are expected to register for the meeting (including pay the appropriate registration fee) and cover their own expenses. You are strongly encouraged to address this issue at the outset and stay on top of this throughout the process if your program is accepted. The Section staff and Meeting Co-Chairs have sufficient last-minute details to address without having to add the intricacies of a speaker seeking a last-minute accommodation. If you’ve chaired a program or a meeting before, then you know exactly what I mean.

By the way, Program Chairs, not Committee Chairs, are ultimately responsible for the successful planning and presentation of a selected program. If you’re going to chair a program, then please keep in mind that the work on your program really begins once your proposal has been accepted, and doesn’t stop until the meeting is over.

Lastly, chairing a program is a challenge, but one worth pursuing, and a great experience at the end of the day. I strongly encourage you to submit a program proposal.