Basics for good NSF proposal
Jim Pepin
CTO
Clemson University
Proposal 101

• You request funds from NSF based on the Program Solicitation.
• Read it several times. Have someone(s) else read it several times, argue with them about what it is says.
• Come up with a story that weaves your strengths with the asks. Be sure to answer all of them
• Assign someone to be keeper of the trivia.
Proposal 101

• When you write the summary page it is the most important page in the whole proposal. Include all the elements of your story and the answer(s) to the asks. (remember reviewers are reading many proposals)

• The main body has to have the details, be sure to include quotes for equipment (put in as directed, may not be in body).

• You may consider highlighting the answers to request points to, be sure reviewer sees them. Re-read them to be sure they are clear.
Proposal 101

• When you build a budget be sure you check it for math mistakes and gross silliness. Also be sure your campus administrative office that clears proposal checks it. Be sure your keeper of the trivia checks it.

• You have to include science story(ies) they may be written by you science partners. If they are written individually be sure to edit the English to match the main style of the proposal.
Things that can kill you

• Wrong fonts/size
• After entering data online be sure it is what you think it is.
• Missing items from the supplemental materials.
• Don’t have correct people sign.
• Late submission
  – Be sure you have been entering data online from beginning. Don’t expect to do it in last 24 hrs.
• If you have partners you may end up angry with each other but someone has to be in charge and get all things in place (keeper of the trivia). Don’t assume anything about what it don’t or not. See it before you believe it’s done.
• Have the keeper of the trivia read/check for english and spelling. Be consistent in tenses, first person or 3rd person etc. Don’t have paragraph sized sentences.
Things that can make it win

• Be very clear in wording. Use simple sentences with concise words. Don’t be ambiguous.
• Tell a story why your campus will use this money well and how it will make a difference.
• Link the science and request for ‘something’ with the CI plan, show how this will make a difference and how the solicitation is right venue.
Things that can help make it win

- Broader impact is not just a check list item. Be sure to state why/how your proposal can help more than just your campus or a researcher. Why does this help national or international or regional communities. Think about this long and hard.

- Intellectual merit has multiple sub categories be sure to hit them in your text.

- Link to CI plan is critical make it clear
Things that can help make it win

• If you can show something unique in approach or results of the funding be sure to highlight it.

• Be sure to describe how you have capacity to make this work (people, support from admin etc). Be specific. If you have a staff member who is hero at X be sure to mention by name and include in plan.