

Grantmakers for Education's 14th Annual Conference
October 26-29, 2010 | New Orleans, LA

The Fierce Urgency of Now: Fulfilling the Promise of Excellence and Equity

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Grantmakers for Education invites members to propose learning sessions for our 14th annual conference, "The Fierce Urgency of Now: Fulfilling the Promise of Excellence and Equity."

Please note: although this RFP itself is quite long, we don't expect lengthy essays in response. The detailed instructions are intended to give you clear guidance as you prepare your submission. Ultimately, we are looking for proposals that have clear learning objectives, an engaging format, relevance for funders and clear connection to the conference theme and framing, described below.

Framing for the 2010 GFE Conference

The American promise of education as the fundamental driver for upward mobility and national prosperity stands in peril. As disparities in educational opportunities, resources and outcomes continue to grow, excellence and equity remain out of reach for too many young people. The resulting civic, social justice and economic imperatives demand we be more aware, aligned and precise in remaking our education systems.

Increasingly frustrated by the pace of incremental improvement, education grantmakers seek more powerful approaches to achieve systemic change. How can we build new partnerships that deepen our collective impact? How can we harness the potential of innovation, while grounding our efforts in rigor and a deep understanding of what works? What role can grantmakers play in building the public will to transform and invigorate the entire education pipeline?

Join Grantmakers for Education as we convene the nation's largest gathering of education funders this fall in New Orleans, where, five years after Hurricane Katrina, both the promise and the crisis of American education remain in sharp focus. Even as we celebrate resilience and highlight models of success, we gather with a heightened sense of immediacy, a greater sense of opportunity and a renewed commitment to providing equity and excellence for all learners.

Deadlines, Eligibility and Commitments

The deadline for online submissions is 5 pm PT on Tuesday, March 16, 2010.

All GFE members are welcome to propose a session. Approximately 20 session proposals will be selected.

Organizers of all accepted proposals must participate in a briefing call with GFE staff to discuss successful conference session design tips. This call will be scheduled for early May and will ensure accepted sessions reflect what—and how—conference attendees tell us they want to learn.

Because the conference committee may suggest revisions to a proposed session, we ask that you please do not confirm your speakers at the time you submit your proposal; simply indicate whom you plan to invite. ***Session organizers and all speakers from a grantmaking organization must register for and attend the conference at their own expense.***

Session Format

The conference will feature 90-minute concurrent learning sessions. We strongly encourage you to be inventive and to organize a session you would actually like to attend. Please set aside the PowerPoint and avoid planning a panel presentation! Strive for: interactive, dialogue-based, creative and honest.

In organizing your session, start from what you hope to learn or accomplish from it, and work backwards to design a format that will accomplish those goals. Be realistic! 90 minutes will fly by quickly, so focus on no more than 2-4 important takeaways for you and your audience. Your learning objectives are the most important part of your proposal—and your session—so we hope you will devote some real thought to them. Focus primarily on the audience's likely interests and needs rather than on what you want to tell them. Session proposals that clearly challenge education grantmakers to refine their grantmaking - in terms of the craft itself and in ways that speak to this year's thematic foci of excellence and equity - will be particularly well received.

When designing your session, please limit the number of speakers so that the conversation can go into greater depth thus avoiding a superficial treatment of a wider range of issues or perspectives. We strongly prefer sessions that have no more than 2 presenters plus a moderator; *under no circumstances will we accept sessions with more than 3 presenters and a moderator.*

Finally, please be sure to read "What makes a good conference session?" on page 3.

Selection Criteria

We are looking for lively sessions that will help grantmakers to refine their grantmaking strategies, make important connections with peers and deepen their understanding of effective approaches to improve education. The conference planning committee will select proposals with these attributes:

Insightful: We are looking for provocative sessions that are tied to the conference theme and its framing language, and that either explore new concerns or take perennial topics and advance the conversation to a deeper level. Because GFE values a diversity of perspectives, we're particularly interested in sessions that challenge funders to consider old problems or assumptions in new ways by, among other strategies, incorporating fresh voices and perspectives.

Reflective: GFE's conference aims to be a learning environment that promotes reflection and peer exchange. We are looking for sessions that create genuine conversations among grantmakers and that engage their wisdom and experience.

Well-conceived learning format: Sessions should be designed with thoughtful, relevant learning objectives – and then be crafted to meet them. Generally we look for sessions that engage the audience as active learners and provide them with well-designed opportunities for discussion, rather than just Q&A. In some cases, it may be appropriate to structure a session as a traditional panel – for example, if the goal is to provide a deeper understanding of a complex issue – but this format is too often the default, and we strongly encourage you to consider more interactive formats. And of course, we seek sessions where speakers and moderators bring depth, experience and energy.

Clear lessons or ideas for funders: Sessions should provide participants with understandings or tools that will help them in their work as education grantmakers. Rather than focusing on telling the story of what a particular grantmaker did, sessions should examine the rationale for the strategy, the lessons learned and the transferability/implications for other funders. Funders want to understand the grantmaking "back-story" – the choices and decisions that led to particular outcomes – and to acquire tools or ideas to apply to their own grantmaking. Generally, we opt for sessions that do not showcase a single grantmaker's work or program.

Topical: We are especially interested in sessions that specifically address or reflect the conference themes, although if you make a compelling case for the relevance of a topic outside the theme, the committee will consider it thoughtfully.

Examination of GFE's Principles for Effective Education Grantmaking: GFE has identified eight practices that we think lead to more effective grantmaking in education. We encourage sessions to *explicitly refer to these principles*, test assumptions and tensions, and help grantmakers consider how to apply these principles to real-world grantmaking (you can download the principles from www.edfunders.org/downloads/GFE_principles_flier.pdf). Please take care to consider the principles as you define your session's learning objectives.

Priority Themes: Within GFE's programming we are particularly interested in holding out the following themes as being especially important: 1) closing the achievement gap for students from diverse racial, national origin and low-income backgrounds; 2) strengthening and aligning the education pipeline; 3) improving teaching and leadership; 4) fostering innovation and new models for learning; and 5) expanding philanthropy's understanding of and engagement with education policy. Given these foci, we are especially interested in session proposals that engage one or more of these topics.

Relevant to different types of funders: GFE's conference attendees are a diverse group of grantmakers working on issues across the education continuum – from early education to K-12 schools to out-of-school programs to higher education – with a wide range of strategies, budgets and scope of geographic focus. The conference planning committee will choose a final slate of sessions that reflect this range of interests. While we appreciate proposals that are attractive to a diversity of funders, it is equally important that the proposals are clear about the group(s) for whom the session is most appropriate. Our strong preference is to have sessions that help a well-defined group of grantmakers improve their craft, as opposed to those sessions that try to be all things to all people.

How to Submit a Session

We have a ***new*** online process for submitting RFPs. Please submit your session proposal using this online form: <http://fs9.formsite.com/GFEducation/RFP2010/index.html>.

We recognize that you might need several days to complete the form; once you click on the link and create an account, you will be able to save and revise your proposal before submitting it.

If you'd like to submit more than one proposal, please create a separate login for each proposal submission.

All RFPs must be finished and submitted electronically by 5 pm PT on Tuesday, March 16, 2010. If you have questions, please contact delaurere@edfunders.org.

* * * * *

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What makes a good conference session?

Good sessions start with the audience in mind. What do they hope to learn at the conference? What knowledge do they bring to the session? How can your session engage them as learners? Good sessions also take conversations at past conferences as a starting point and move the conversation deeper. What do we know now that we didn't know 5 or 10 years ago? How can you move your session beyond making the case for *why* a particular strategy or issue area is important and push it into an examination of *how* grantmakers can make progress on that issue – the tradeoffs and decisions that underlie your grantmaking strategy?

It's much easier to criticize a session than to design one, but it's useful to reflect on your experience as an audience member when designing a session, and think of how sessions can miss the mark. These comments from recent past evaluations offer some cautions:

- *"I would like more interactive sessions – there's often more expertise in the room than on the panels."*
- *"The link between theory and practice was not made as often as it should have been."*

- *"We need to move beyond planning that consists of "People I know and like" to "Who is the audience and what's the message?"*
- *"Sessions were disappointing to me, an experienced grantmaker, because panelists did not know much about their topic."*
- *"I think we're starting to repeat stuff over and over again."*
- *"Presentations were either too broad/theoretical or too simplistic and narrow in their approach."*
- *"Do not have presenters that are there to tout their own programs and agendas."*
- *"Strategies shared must be transferable"*
- *"Concentrate on soliciting people to moderate sessions who are actually talented moderators and not just an additional speaker...moderators failed to keep speakers on the topic and asked uninformed questions."*

Who should I ask to be my presenters?

Be sure to give careful consideration to your speakers and moderators. The best sessions have engaging speakers who bring deep, practical experience; connect their insights to the broader field; and present grantmaking decisions and considerations rather than just describing model programs. In choosing a speaker, ask yourself: Will this person be an energetic and dynamic presenter? Will the speaker offer concrete lessons drawn from hands-on work? Can this person also connect their work to the broader context of the field? Is this someone who has already helped to push your own thinking about strategic, capable grantmaking?

In choosing a moderator, find someone who is confident and knowledgeable, and who can manage the time well (90 minutes goes by quickly!). Your designated moderator must be skillful in guiding a conversation, with in-depth understanding about education philanthropy and the interests of a grantmaker audience. This moderator will be instrumental in guiding the conversation deeper on key points and ensuring the focus remains centered on implications for grantmaking.

What are the expectations of my presenters?

During the summer, GFE will organize a MANDATORY call for all speakers and a separate MANDATORY call for all moderators to outline strategies for ensuring the sessions meet conference attendees' needs (for more details see the session planning timeline below). As a session organizer, you will also plan additional calls with speakers and moderators to discuss your session in detail.

All moderators and speakers are required to register for the conference. Moderators and speakers from grantmaking organizations are expected to register for and attend the conference at the full conference rate. Moderators and speakers who are not from grantmaking organizations (grantees, government representatives, etc.) may register to attend the conference only for the day they are speaking at no cost; they may opt to attend the full conference by paying a discounted registration fee.

Will GFE pay for speaker travel?

We encourage you to identify outside sources of travel funding for your speakers, or to choose speakers from New Orleans. GFE can underwrite travel costs for 8 speakers total for all breakout sessions. Please indicate if you are requesting travel assistance for a speaker who is not an education funder. Usually we will not support more than one speaker in a session. (NOTE: ***The organizers of accepted sessions, and all speakers who represent grantmaking organizations, must register for and attend the conference at their own expense.***)

What about AV?

We are happy to provide flipcharts, DVD players/TVs and screens. If you need an LCD projector, please bring your own. Although PowerPoint presentations can provide helpful visual aids, we have found after many years of experience that they do more harm than good for a session, and we encourage you to think carefully about whether they are really necessary. In the rare instances when they are, we expect presenters to give deep consideration to how to use them effectively.

What is the session planning timeline?

Feb. 17	Call for sessions released.
March 16	Session proposals due 5 pm PT.
April 30	GFE sends notifications of selected sessions. Some may be contacted by a conference planning committee member who will work with you to further refine the session based on previous conference evaluations and member interests.
Early May	Session organizers are required to participate in a GFE call about strategies for ensuring the session meets conference attendees' needs.
May 21	Session organizers finalize all speakers and send complete contact and biographical information to GFE. Organizers also clarify expectations with non-grantmaker speakers regarding who is responsible for their travel/hotel costs and explain the reimbursement procedures of the sponsoring grantmaker, if applicable.
June 8	Registration opens
July	GFE sends confirmation letters to all speakers, with hotel reservation instructions. Session details will be printed in the registration brochure and mailed to all members.
Summer	GFE speakers and moderators (separately) are required to participate in a GFE call outlining strategies for ensuring the session meets conference attendees' needs.
Mid Aug.	Session organizers convene planning calls with their moderator and speaker(s) re: key points, role coordination and to discuss AV /special room layout needs.
Aug. 27	Session organizer provides GFE with room setup and AV requirements.
Sept. 24	Registration closes (All session organizers, moderators and speakers from a grantmaking organization are expected to register for and attend the conference).
Oct. 26	Preconference activities
Oct. 27-29	GFE 14th Annual Conference – New Orleans, LA

How to Submit a Session

We have a ***new*** online process for submitting RFPs. Please submit your session proposal using this online form: <http://fs9.formsite.com/GFEducation/RFP2010/index.html>.

We recognize that you might need several days to complete the form; once you click on the link and create an account, you will be able to save and revise your proposal before submitting it.

If you'd like to submit more than one proposal, please create a separate login for each proposal submission.

All RFPs must be finished and submitted electronically by 5 pm PT on Tuesday, March 16, 2010. If you have questions, please contact delaurere@edfunders.org.