2020 Annual Conference

Session Proposal Submission Guide

grantmakers for education
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Please note: Session proposal forms are due March 20, 2020
Welcome!

Grantmakers for Education invites members to propose learning sessions for our 24th annual conference — *Keeping Our Promises to the Next Generation: Education and Democracy*. **Only Grantmakers for Education members may propose conference sessions** (click [here](#) to inquire about membership) – doing so is an exclusive member benefit. If you are not sure whether your organization is a member, please contact membership@edfunders.org.

Grantmakers for Education’s annual conference will be held October 12-14, 2020 in New York City at the New York Hilton Midtown. The conference is GFE’s signature program. Centered on improving outcomes for all learners, the annual conference is designed to challenge education philanthropists as they adapt to a rapidly evolving field that is ever more interconnected. Highly rated year after year, our conferences unite funders and experts in exploration of the deep and sometimes thorny education and philanthropic issues on the horizon.

We are seeking provocative proposals that proactively prepare funders for the future using engaging formats, innovative ideas, diverse perspectives and a focus on impact. Proposals should have clear learning objectives, specific strategies for engagement, and relevance for funders. Proposal topics should have clear connection to the conference theme.

As you write your proposal, think seriously about how conference attendees will engage with your session. Over the years, attendees have told us that they most enjoy sessions that allow them to connect with presenters and fellow participants. Engaging sessions leave attendees with more actionable learnings and encourage collaboration after the conference.

The instructions below should serve as guidance as you prepare your session.

**2020 Annual Conference Theme**

*Keeping Our Promises to the Next Generation: Education and Democracy*

We stand on the cusp of a new decade, with the census and presidential election in our immediate sights, and with facts and the value of education under question. This is a prime moment to explore the interconnection between education and democracy.

Our democracy—both its people and its systems—has reached an inflection point. More than half of students enrolled in public education are learners of color, and the United States will soon have no clear racial or ethnic majority. The needs of learners are constantly, quickly evolving as a complex future unfolds that few can predict. Civic, community and family engagement are particularly important as we feel divided by politics, identity and technology.

- Is our education system prepared to serve a student populace that differs significantly from when the system was developed?
- Are we preparing young people to participate in a society that looks and acts profoundly different from the one we grew up in?
- Will today’s learners be ready and able to meet the promise of fulfilling work and meaningful contribution to society?
- What essential capacities will learners need in order to support a strong democracy?

As priorities, demographics and technologies change, our education system must be responsive to the changing needs of students. An inclusive democracy depends on it.
Again at the larger-than-life backdrop of New York City, we invite you to venture into big and brave thinking on these issues. Join with hundreds of education funders, experts, and partners to explore role of philanthropy in shaping and supporting a resilient democracy and vibrant public education for the next generation.

By drawing from the voices of education stakeholders (grantmakers, researchers, practitioners, students, etc.), you can help attendees examine best practices, policies, interventions and support structures that can impact grantmaking and learning in and out of the classroom. Your session may be the key to expanding awareness of learning methods critical to student success, or advancing grantmaking practice to a new level — and may ultimately contribute to the success of our communities and democracy.

**Selection Criteria**

Grantmakers for Education’s (GFE) annual conference planning committee—consisting of representatives from a range of grantmaking organizations across GFE’s membership (including size, grantmaking budget, area of focus and type of foundation)—works collaboratively with GFE staff to provide critical input and perspective on the session selection process, which takes place in April and May. Selections will be informed by the following criteria:

**General Criteria**

**Topical and future facing:** We are especially interested in sessions that specifically address or reflect the conference theme and, within that context, showcase new and emerging work and innovative and break-through models. Additionally, we look for sessions relevant to what’s happening in education today and that anticipate future issues in the field.

**Insightful and reflective:** We are looking for sessions that explore new concerns or take perennial topics and advance the conversation to a deeper level. We’re particularly interested in sessions that challenge funders to consider old problems or assumptions in new ways. We like sessions that create genuine conversations among attending grantmakers and that engage their wisdom and experience.

**Thought-leadership and diversity:** As the largest gathering of education philanthropists, GFE’s annual conference is a one-of-a-kind opportunity to gather the leading voices in the field. Speakers and moderators who bring depth, experience and energy to a session are valued. Speakers should also reflect a diversity of perspectives and experiences and where appropriate, provide fresh voices. If it’s possible to confirm your speakers at this time, please do so and indicate this on the RFP form, as this will help to inform our decision.

**Well-conceived and innovative learning format:** Sessions should provide participants with practical tools and knowledge that will help them grow as education grantmakers and strengthen their work. Sessions should give a behind-the-scenes look at the rationale for a strategy, the lessons learned, and the choices and decisions that led to particular outcomes. We look for sessions that engage the audience as active learners. Please consider untraditional and innovative strategies for learning; check the Selection Tips below for ideas.

**Clear lessons and evidence for funders:** Craft sessions to meet thoughtful, relevant learning objectives. Ideas presented should be clearly linked to supporting data. Funders should leave the session with a clear understanding of evidence and how to apply lessons to their own grantmaking.
Member Value

**Grantmakers for Education’s Operating Principles:** We encourage proposals that incorporate our strategic principles by helping to prepare our members for the challenges and opportunities of the future. Sessions should provide opportunities for new thinking, diversity of opinion, and open-minded discourse that respects different perspectives and encourages challenging conversation.

**Outcomes based:** Our intent is to encourage data-driven sessions, based on research and practices that have proven effective in the field.

**Relevant to different types of funders:** GFE’s conference attendees are a diverse group of grantmakers working on issues across the education continuum—cradle to career—with a wide range of strategies, budgets and geographic focuses. The conference planning committee will choose a final slate of sessions that reflect this range of interests. In your submission, please clearly state the group(s) for whom the session is most appropriate. While we appreciate proposals that are attractive to a diversity of funders, our strong preference is to have sessions that help a well-defined group of grantmakers improve their craft.

**Selection Tips**

Grantmakers for Education is always striving to provide the best experience possible for its attendees at the annual conference. Breakout sessions comprise a major portion of the conference program, so it’s important that they provide an atmosphere that inspires collaborative and experiential learning that our attendees will not forget. Here are some suggestions that can transform ordinary sessions into highly engaging ones.

1. **Make it relevant**—Proposals need to have a strong link with our conference theme and current issues in education and/or philanthropy.
2. **Accommodate different learning styles**—One of Grantmakers for Education’s major strengths is the diversity we find in our membership, both at the organizational and individual level. Your session needs to incorporate strategies that will cater to learners of all types.
3. **Make it interactive**—Attendees continually ask for more interactive sessions. While using a PowerPoint presentation or having a panel of speakers can be informative, it often leads to attendees being talked to rather than included in the conversation. Here are some strategies to consider:
   - **Keep the presentation brief.** Instead of making the presentation the focus of the session, use it as a jumping off point for discussion.
   - **Encourage small group discussion.** Use a format like a “world café” to allow participants to discuss topics with each other.
   - **Get up and moving.** Incorporate a “data walk” to allow participants to stretch their legs and engage with your session.
   - **Host a show and tell.** Share a tool that you use in your work, and allow participants to experiment with it.
   - **Teach a skill.** Use your session as a workshop to teach participants a skill or strategy that they will be able to use in their own work.
   - **Play a game.** Incorporate a game of Jeopardy to see what participants have learned, or play an improv game to brainstorm ways to use new tools or strategies.
Speaker Requirements

All speakers must register for the conference (at minimum, they will incur a one-day registration fee) before the conference registration deadline, September 30, 2020. Many session organizers support some or all of speaker travel, lodging and registration.

All speakers must commit to the presentation of a session at designated times during the conference, October 12-14, 2020 in New York City, NY.

Support

We are here to help! If you have any questions regarding your proposal submission, please email Grantmakers for Education at programs@edfunders.org.

Important Dates

February 20, 2020 — Submission period opens.
March 20, 2020 — Proposals due by 5:00 pm PT.
Late May 2020 — Applicants will be notified about the status of their proposals.
September 30, 2020 – Conference registration deadline.
October 12-14, 2020 — Annual conference in New York City.

How to Submit a Session

Only Grantmakers for Education (GFE) members may propose conference sessions (click here to learn more about membership)—doing so is an exclusive GFE member benefit.

We have an online process for submitting proposals, which will open February 20. A link to the submission form will be provided on the Grantmakers for Education website on that date.

You will need to create an account before accessing the form. Multiple proposals may be submitted using one account. Even if you have submitted a proposal in past years, you will need to create a new account.

All proposals are due by 5:00 pm PT on Friday, March 20, 2020.