

# 2025 Annual Conference Session Proposal Submission Guide

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**\*Submission Deadline: June 12, 2025\***

**[Submit your proposals here.](#)**

## Welcome!

Grantmakers for Education (Edfunders) invites members to propose learning sessions for our 2025 [annual conference](#) — *Transformative Philanthropy: Courageous and Visionary Leadership for Education and Civil Rights*. **Only Grantmakers for Education members may propose conference sessions** (click [here](#) to learn more about membership) – doing so is an exclusive member benefit. If you are not sure whether your organization is a member, please refer to [this list](#) or contact [membership@edfunders.org](mailto:membership@edfunders.org).

The person who submits the proposal will also serve as the session organizer and main point of contact, unless otherwise indicated. Only people from member organizations may be session organizers. Nonmembers, including representatives from grantee organizations and other partners, cannot be the session organizer or primary point of contact.

The conference is Grantmakers for Education's flagship event, where we convene education funders so that they have a dynamic space to learn, share, network and advance progress toward improving educational outcomes for all students. 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. This year's conference will take place October 21-23 in Memphis, Tennessee.

We are seeking proposals that deliver learning experiences which help grantmakers become better practitioners, create spaces for inspiration and connection, and encourage healthy discourse and dialogue. We encourage engaging formats, innovative ideas, diverse perspectives and a focus on measurable impact in your organization, in the communities your grantee organizations serve, or generally in the fields of education and/or education philanthropy. Lastly, session proposals should have clear learning objectives, specific strategies for audience engagement, relevance for funders, and should align to Grantmakers for Education's [guiding principles](#).

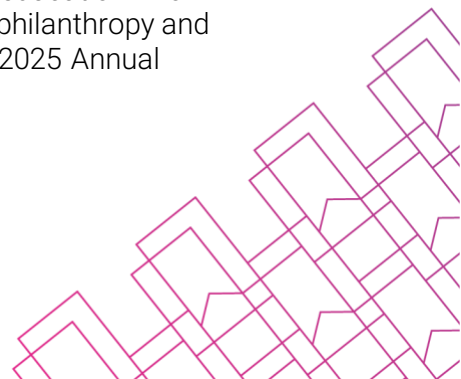
As you write your proposal, think seriously about how conference attendees will engage with your session. Over the years, attendees have told us that **they appreciate sessions that allow them to connect with presenters and fellow participants**. Engaging sessions leave attendees with actionable learnings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

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

## 2025 Annual Conference Theme

**Transformative Philanthropy: Courageous and Visionary Leadership for Education and Civil Rights**

Where can philanthropy make the most strategic and powerful impact in education - now and for the future - and how? This is the central invitation that education philanthropy and its partners are being called to engage at the Grantmakers for Education 2025 Annual Conference.



We are gathering at a time when so much is on the line for learners of all ages, in all places and spaces, and when their access, attainment and agency are being shaped. Philanthropic organizations are evaluating how they lean into their values and enact their strategies in the near and long term. Education leaders in all spheres are operating in shifting environments where the nexus between education and other systems and sectors prompts examination, exchange and action.

This is a milestone year for the Grantmakers for Education community. We celebrate 30 years since our founding by a group of visionary leaders who sought to improve student outcomes by strengthening philanthropy's capacity and effectiveness. Returning to the city of our first conference, we are gathering in a place that offers a poignant backdrop for looking at the issues of the day with a historical lens, illustrating resilient and intrepid resolve, and illuminating universal needs, opportunities and aspirations.

We are all key players in a time when the very nature of education may be transformed. This moment requires courageous and visionary leadership from philanthropy – an exchange for its profound privilege to address immediate needs in creative and collaborative ways and imagine a future where education is a true public good that affirms individual civil rights and delivers broad societal benefit.

At this year's conference, we will be inspired to grapple with issues from a range of experiences and angles, to sharpen our thinking about what transformative philanthropy looks like for an affirmative vision of education, to showcase models of innovative leadership strategies, and to show up as the best version of ourselves as a sector.

## Session Types

The conference program includes several types of breakout sessions. You can select the type of session you are interested in presenting on the session proposal form.

*A note on audience: The primary audience of the conference consists of education grantmakers, including board members, CEOs and other senior directors, program officers, researchers and evaluators, and grant managers. Other interested parties, such as community leaders, academics, students and educators may be present in sessions because we extend the courtesy to our speakers to attend sessions on the day they are speaking.*

### LEARNING SESSIONS

**A 75-minute session** in the form of an interactive workshop, panel session, multimodal presentation, and other dynamic session designs (e.g., World Café). Limited to 3-4 speakers, these sessions allow participants to engage with new material, presenters, and each other to explore and examine critical topics in education and philanthropy.

### SPARK SESSIONS

**A 45-minute session** in the form of a brief, inspirational presentation by an individual or a two-person talk on a specific topic that aims to share expertise and insights about an



innovative idea or concept. These sessions are designed to spark interest and ignite engagement on new and novel topics in education and philanthropy.

## DEEP DIVES

A **2-hour session** designed to delve into a particular topic through engaging formats. These sessions offer a focused exploration, foster a deep understanding of complexities of the topic, and provide participants with concrete, actionable takeaways. Opportunities to host deep dives are limited.

## Selection Criteria

Grantmakers for Education's annual conference planning committee—consisting of representatives from a range of grantmaking organizations across EdFunders' membership (including size, grantmaking budget, geographic coverage, area of focus and type of foundation)—works collaboratively with EdFunders staff to provide critical input and perspective on the session selection process, which takes place in June through August. **While we welcome multiple session proposals from each member organization, it is very likely that only one session will be considered for acceptance given a substantial increase in proposals submitted annually.** For the 2024 Annual Conference, just under half of all submissions were selected. Selections will be informed by the following criteria:

**Presents content that is timely, insightful, and relevant to funders:**

1. Bring into focus issues, regions and student populations where philanthropy currently underfunds or overlooks.
2. Takes perennial topics and advances the conversation in new and deeper ways.
3. Elevates new information and novel grantmaking models.
4. Presents cutting-edge work in the research, practice, or philanthropy of education, and provides clear lessons, tools and evidence for funders.

**Provides access to unique and powerful speakers that funders may not normally be able to access:**

1. The speaker(s) reflect a diversity of backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences and may represent new or traditionally underrepresented voices.
2. Provides a space for a variety of viewpoints and dialogue which allows people unfamiliar with the content to get a sense of the breadth and depth of a topic/issue.

**Delivers an overall learning experience that can help grantmakers become better practitioners, creates spaces for inspiration and connection, and/or encourages healthy discourse and dialogue:**

Presents a coherent alignment between a proposed session's goals.

1. Provides participants with practical tools and knowledge that will help them grow as education grantmakers and strengthen their work.
2. Accommodates different learning styles.

3. Incorporates an engaging and interactive session format that is thoughtfully and intentionally designed for the [session type](#) being pursued.

#### Other considerations:

1. If proposing a Learning Session or Spark Session, the number of proposed speakers should meet the expectations for each session type.
2. We strongly recommend sessions showcase fresh material and insights that have not been presented at other conferences or past Grantmakers for Education annual conferences.

## Session Tips

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

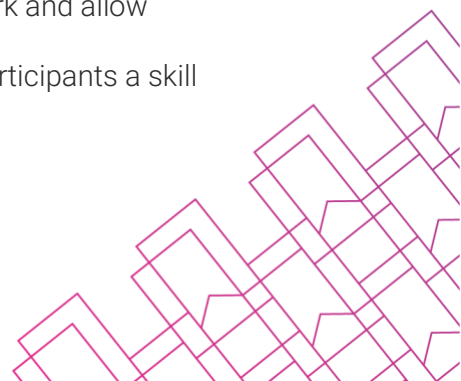
**Make it relevant:** Please keep grantmakers in mind as your key audience as you craft your session description and design the session itself. Grantmakers should be able to walk away answering the question: "What does this mean for me and my work?"

**Accommodate different learning styles:** Your session needs to incorporate strategies that will cater to learners of all types. Consider neurodiversity and social preferences (e.g., introversion or preference for independent work vs group activity) when designing your session.

**Provide access to unique and powerful speakers:** Attendees seek opportunities at our conference to learn from and engage with speakers that they do not normally have access to.

**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. Attendees bring a wealth of knowledge to the conference – take advantage of it! 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 pair or small group discussion.** Use a format like a ["world café"](#) to allow participants to discuss topics with each other.
- **Get 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 tool 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

If possible, please have your proposed speakers agree to be on your panel (if the session is accepted) before submitting your proposal and indicate this on the RFP form.

Speaker registration:

- All speakers must register for the conference before the speaker registration deadline (September 2).
- We offer a special, one-day registration rate available to all speakers. Speakers who are not funders or members should plan to use this registration option and register only for the day on which they are speaking. Non-funder speakers are not eligible to register for the full conference.
- Speakers who are nonmember funders AND wish to attend the full conference will need to pay the full conference nonmember registration rate.
- Speakers who are members AND wish to attend the full conference will need to pay the full conference member registration rate.
- **Grantmakers for Education does not cover the cost of speaker attendance.** This means that either speakers must pay their own way, or more commonly, session organizers support some or all speaker travel, lodging and registration. Keep this in mind as you propose speakers since unfunded travel/registration costs can make engagement by young people, educators and nonprofit and community leaders difficult. Please make it clear to your speakers when you invite them whether you will be covering their costs.

All speakers must commit to the in-person presentation of their session at designated times during the conference. Dates and times will be confirmed during the end of summer.

## Important Dates

May 1— Submission period opens.

June 12 — Proposals due by 11:59 pm PT.

Mid-late August — Applicants will be notified about the status of their proposals.

July 7 — Early bird registration opens for members.

July 14 — Early bird registration opens for all other funders.

August 11 — Early bird registration deadline.

September 2 — Speaker registration deadline.

October 6 — Conference registration deadline.

October 20 — Preconference.

October 21-23— Annual conference at the Renasant Convention Center and The Peabody Hotel, Memphis, Tennessee.



## How to Submit a Session

Only Grantmakers for Education (EdFunders) members may propose conference sessions and be session organizers ([click here to learn more about membership](#))—doing so is an exclusive member benefit.

We have an online process for submitting proposals, which will open May 1.

### [Submit your proposals here.](#)

We recognize that you may need several days to complete the RFP form. Before you start to fill out the form, create an account so you will be able to save and revise your proposals before submitting. Multiple proposals may be submitted using one account.

All proposals are due by 11:59 pm PT on Thursday, June 12, 2025.

We highly encourage submitting authors to add [conference@edfunders.org](mailto:conference@edfunders.org) to your email contacts to avoid the risk of important communication going to spam and junk mail.

## Support

### RESOURCES

[Watch a video](#) on how to submit a proposal, including what's new for this year.

[Preview the RFP questions.](#) Note that you will only be able proposals via the online RFP portal.

### HOW TO REACH US

We are here to help! If you have any questions regarding your proposal submission, please email Grantmakers for Education at [conference@edfunders.org](mailto:conference@edfunders.org). We strongly recommend adding this email address to your contacts so that our emails don't land in your junk folder.