

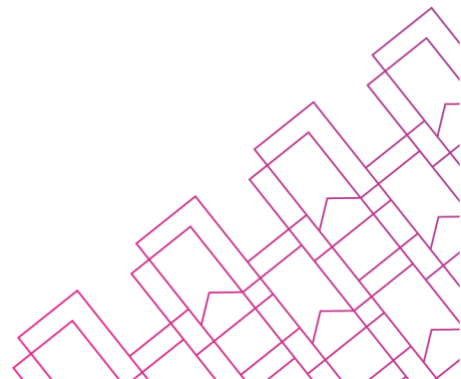
2026 Annual Conference Session Proposal Submission Guide

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Submission Deadline: May 8, 2026

[Submit your proposals here.](#)



Welcome!

Grantmakers for Education invites members to propose learning sessions for our 2026 [annual conference](#) – *Designing Systems of Abundance and Shared Well-being: Education at the Center*. **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.

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 13-15 in New York, New York.

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.

2026 Annual Conference Theme

Designing Systems of Abundance and Shared Well-being: Education at the Center

This is a pivotal moment in our living history. Against an ever-changing social, economic and political backdrop, childcare centers, classrooms, campuses and local communities have become spaces of both adaptation and persistent conflict and crisis. We gather this



year to reclaim education as a true public good that affirms civil rights, ensures all learners have what they need and delivers broad societal benefit.

This year's conference explores what it means to position education as the core infrastructure within a broader ecosystem. We will engage a mindset of abundance and examine what it takes to adopt a strategy grounded in well-being both in education systems and from the philanthropic beliefs and behaviors that support them.

Realizing this vision requires more than isolated initiatives. From cross-sector collaboration to policy alignment, and from coordinated strategy to shared responsibility, this year's theme focuses on strengthening connection and coherence across the full education continuum - starting at birth and through the lifetime, at all times of day and year, and occurring in classrooms, on campuses and within homes, communities and workplaces.

These questions sit at the heart of the 2026 Grantmakers for Education annual conference:

- What do systems of abundance and shared well-being look like with education at the center?
- With the reality of fragmentation, how do we foster coherence across early learning and development, K-12, postsecondary education, workforce development, adult learning and community programs?
- How is a human-centered focus maintained through rapid technological advances?
- What are the operating structures that are misaligned with the outcomes we are working toward? And to what end must they be repaired, reimagined or replaced?

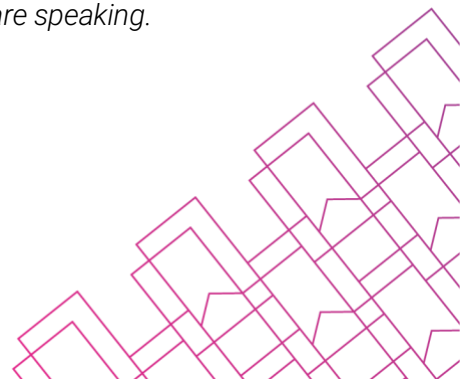
Throughout this national gathering, we'll surface bold ideas, raise urgent questions for generative dialogue, and consider practical pathways forward. Together, we will reflect on this moment and help shape what comes next.

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 the 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 Grantmakers for Education's membership (including size, grantmaking budget, geographic coverage, area of focus and type of foundation)—works collaboratively with Grantmakers for Education staff to provide critical input and perspective on the session selection process, which takes place in May 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 the large number of proposals submitted annually.** For the 2025 annual conference, 39% of all submissions were selected. Selections will be informed by the following criteria:

Offers opportunities to grapple with the most salient issues in education and philanthropy and engage with content that is timely, insightful, and relevant.

1. Spotlights underfunded or overlooked issues, regions, and student populations.
2. Takes perennial topics and advances the conversation in new and deeper ways.
3. Elevates emerging insights and innovative grantmaking models.
4. Presents cutting-edge work in the research, practice, or philanthropy of education, and provides clear lessons, tools and evidence for funders.
5. Provides participants with practical tools and knowledge that will help them grow as education grantmakers and strengthen their work.

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.

Are interactive experiences that do not rely on panel presentations as the sole design modality:

- Creates space for engaging, learning and connecting across a diverse group of experts and peers.
- 1. Accommodates different learning styles and personalities.
- 2. Incorporates an engaging and interactive session format that is thoughtfully and intentionally designed for the [session type](#) being pursued.
- Presents a coherent alignment between a proposed session's goals.

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 17).
- We offer a special, one-day registration rate of \$650 and two-day rate of \$1,000 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

April 1 – Submission period opens.

May 8 – Proposals due by 11:59 pm PT.

Early August – Applicants will be notified about the status of their proposals.

June 30 – Early bird registration opens for members.

July 7 – Early bird registration opens for all other funders.

August 3 – Early bird registration deadline.



September 17 – Speaker registration deadline.

October 1 – Conference registration deadline.

October 12 – Preconference.

October 13-15— Annual conference at the New York Marriot Marquis in New York City

How to Submit a Session

Only Grantmakers for Education 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 April 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 Friday, May 8, 2026.

We highly encourage submitting authors to add 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.

