

2026 UNITED WAY WESTERN REGIONAL CONFERENCE



Breakout Session Proposal Guidelines and Application: Request for Proposals (RFP)

PROPOSALS DUE: SUNDAY, MARCH 8, 2026

[Application Form](#)

About United Way

United Way mobilizes communities to action so all can thrive. True to our founding spirit, whenever there is a need in our communities, United Way is there. We bring a comprehensive approach to every challenge, actively listening and responding to local needs. Our reach across tens of thousands of communities means we can share innovations and scale impact to improve lives around the world. Our work centers around four key impact areas: youth opportunity, healthy communities, financial security, and community resiliency. By coming together to learn, exchange ideas, and renew our collective energy, we strengthen our ability to drive meaningful change in communities worldwide.

About the 2026 United Way Western Regional Conference

The 2026 Western Regional Conference will be held August 24-27 at the Hyatt Regency in Portland, Oregon. This conference will bring together more than 350 United Way leaders, board members, staff, and volunteers from across the western United States for three days of learning, connection, and collective inspiration.

Our conference theme is ***United is the Way: Bold, Resilient, Transformative***. As our communities and the nonprofit sector navigate increasingly complex and rapidly changing landscapes, the need for unity, collaboration, resilience, courage, and innovation has never been more essential. This year's conference will feature dynamic plenaries and breakout sessions that explore best practices and bold strategies for addressing the complex challenges facing our region, our communities, and our organizations.

We invite you to submit a proposal to present a 75-minute breakout session at one of the largest gatherings of United Way professionals in the country. It is a powerful opportunity to share your expertise, elevate your work, and help equip our network with insights and tools that strengthen families and communities across our western region.

Conference Purpose

To bring together staff and board members of United Ways across the western region to learn, connect, and take action, in service of ensuring our collective resilience, equity-centered impact, and capacity to serve our communities effectively.

Desired Outcomes

Attendees leave with:

- A stronger sense of community and deeper relationships across the West for ongoing collaboration, shared problem-solving, and mutual support;
- A deeper understanding of how other local United Ways are:
 - increasing and diversifying revenue to strengthen financial sustainability,
 - strengthening organizational capacity, leadership, and sustainability,
 - leveraging data to inform decisions, strengthen operations, and drive impact,
 - working in service with their communities for impact across the four focus areas, including through advocacy and civic engagement efforts,
 - building brand awareness and credibility with donors, partners, and policymakers, and
 - engaging their teams and boards to more fully center equity in the work;
- Actionable strategies, tools, and templates they can immediately bring back to their organizations;
- Greater understanding of emerging regional trends, challenges, and priorities that influence United Way work across western states and that must be considered as we transform into tomorrow's relevant and impactful United Ways; and
- Insight into how local United Ways are leveraging United Way Worldwide tools, resources, and campaigns, and greater clarity about how participants can apply UWW offerings to strengthen their effectiveness in the coming year.

Session Topics & Priority Focus Areas

As we build the 2026 Western Regional Conference, we aim to offer breakout sessions that strengthen our collective capacity, deepen collaboration, and equip United Ways with the tools needed to navigate a rapidly evolving landscape. With the themes of unity, collaboration, resilience, courage, transformation, and innovation in mind, this year's priority focus areas reflect the core competencies, challenges, and opportunities facing our network today—from advancing equity and community engagement to enhancing organizational excellence, financial sustainability, innovation, and board leadership. We invite presenters to submit proposals for 75-minute breakout sessions that align with one or more of the priority focus areas below and contribute to a stronger, more resilient, and more united United Way network.

The Thriving United Way Framework is a network-created blueprint for high performance, rooted in current best practices and designed to support United Ways of all sizes. It offers clear, aspirational guidance to strengthen impact, fuel growth, and advance the success of our global network. The framework highlights six core areas: (1) Community Leadership, (2) Equitable Community Impact, (3) Brand Strength, Awareness, & Relevance, (4) Diversified Revenue, (5) Strong Organizational Foundation, and (6) Network Citizenship. We have embedded these core areas into the conference outcomes listed above and the priority focus areas listed below. As part of the session proposal submission, you will be asked to explain how your session aligns with at least one of the priority focus areas below.

Priority Focus Areas	Focus Area Description & Example Session Topics
Area 1: Community Impact, Engagement, Equity & Belonging	Sessions that address how we strengthen equitable outcomes by centering community needs, voice, inclusion, and belonging in our work. <i>Examples include but are not limited to: sessions related to any of the four United Way Impact Areas (financial security, healthy communities, youth opportunity, community resiliency); 211; Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion; Civic Engagement; Voter Education; Volunteer & Community Engagement</i>
Area 2: Multi-Sector Partnerships & Collective Action	Sessions that focus on ways to build collaborative, cross-sector partnerships and/or engage in actions that drive systems change and amplify impact across communities. <i>Examples include but are not limited to: Local, Regional, and Statewide Partnerships; Policy & Advocacy; Disaster Preparedness & Response</i>
Area 3: Revenue Growth & Diversification	Sessions that equip organizations with strategies to diversify and increase revenue, strengthen donor engagement, and build long-term financial resilience. <i>Examples include but are not limited to: Resource Diversification; Affinity Group Engagement; Corporate Partnerships; Next Gen Donor Cultivation</i>
Area 4: Brand Strength, Awareness & Relevance	Sessions that focus on strategies to strengthen our organizational relevance and brand awareness to the communities we serve and the donors we seek. <i>Examples include but are not limited to: Brand Awareness Campaigns; Use of Social Media; Partnerships with Media; Local United Way Visibility During Crises</i>
Area 5: Organizational Excellence, Financial Management, & Talent & Culture	Sessions that explore practices that support strong internal operations, financial management, effective leadership, and cultures where staff can thrive. <i>Examples include but are not limited to: Organizational Foundations; Financial Management; AI/Digital Tools for Finance; Talent Management; Staff Well-Being Best Practices; Strategies for Navigating Change, Taking Risks, and Being Resilient in Today's Nonprofit Sector</i>
Area 6: Data, Innovation & Digital Transformation	Sessions that highlight how data, research, technology, and AI can accelerate decision-making, improve outcomes, and drive innovation. <i>Examples include but are not limited to: ALICE and the Real Cost Measure; Data Collection and Usage Practices; Digital Tech & AI; Innovation Strategies</i>
Area 7: Board Leadership & Governance	Sessions that provide foundational knowledge and tools to strengthen board effectiveness and organizational oversight. <i>Examples include but are not limited to: Orientation for New Board Members; Board Engagement & Fundraising Strategies; Strategic Oversight; Board-Staff Partnerships</i>

Crafting a Strong Breakout Session

Crafting a successful 75-minute breakout session requires many considerations. The conference Advisory Committee will use a rubric to guide consistent evaluation across proposals, while also prioritizing a holistic assessment of each session's overall quality, relevance, and value to the network. We encourage you to think about these questions as you craft your proposal:

- **Does the session tie back to the conference theme and priority focus areas?** Conference themes are selected to appeal to United Way staff and board members by reflecting broad trends impacting our organizations but are left intentionally broad to apply to various topics. All sessions should clearly align in some way.
- **Does the session offer practical guidance with actionable recommendations?** We strongly encourage submissions that are practical, engaging, equity-centered, and relevant to the challenges and opportunities facing United Ways today.
- **Does this session contain a United Way voice?** The Advisory Committee will look across all sessions to ensure representation from different job roles and focus areas (e.g., CEOs, board members, community impact, operations) and diverse geographic locations and organizational sizes. We strive to ensure breakout sessions appeal to the broad array of United Ways in the West.
- **Is the session interactive?** We can support a wide variety of breakout session formats (e.g., fishbowl, small group discussions, panel conversation) and seek a diversity of structures to support a variety of learning styles and increase peer engagement, networking, and interaction. All rooms will be set up in rounds to allow for table conversations should you want to have a more interactive session.
- **Does the session weave together intersectional issues?** Whenever possible, we seek to make connections across issue areas and job functions. Sessions that incorporate multiple lenses, including racial and gender equity, revenue generation, data usage, community engagement, and policy and systems change, etc., are encouraged.
- **Does the session have a diversity of perspectives?** We value sessions that reflect a range of perspectives and lived experiences. When appropriate and feasible, we encourage proposals that include speakers from different geographic locations, United Way sizes, and professional roles, as well as diversity across gender, race, ethnicity, LGBTQIA+ identities, disability status, and other historically and systemically marginalized communities. Ideally, every session will include speakers from multiple United Ways, and from differently-sized United Ways, whenever appropriate.
- **Does the session intentionally support equity, inclusion, accessibility, and varied learning styles?** We aim to create learning spaces that are welcoming, psychologically safe, respectful of lived experiences, and accessible to all participants. Please consider how your session incorporates inclusive and accessible design, including multimodal learning supports (e.g., handouts, slides, storytelling, case studies, reflective journaling), as well as trauma-informed practices. Trauma-informed practices may include setting clear expectations, offering content warnings when appropriate, honoring participant choice in sharing, and providing multiple ways to engage.

Submission Requirements & Logistics

Before submitting your proposal, please review the guidelines above to ensure your session aligns with the goals and expectations of the 2026 Western Regional Conference. To help you plan your session proposal, note that each session will last approximately 75 minutes and be set up in rooms with round tables. Each breakout room will include a projector, screen, and power strips (presenters will use their own laptops), and we will provide wireless internet. We can provide a flipchart and markers upon request and can print up to 3 pages, double-sided (no color) handouts, provided that the handouts are for an interactive activity (like a worksheet or group activity).

Each proposal should include, at minimum:

- ☐ Session title
- ☐ Brief session description
- ☐ Clarity about the target audience(s)
- ☐ Insight into the session format and ways it will be interactive
- ☐ Purpose and outcome statements
- ☐ Clarity about how the session aligns with the conference theme and priority focus areas
- ☐ List of possible presenters and a moderator or facilitator
- ☐ Insight into how the session will apply an equity, inclusion, and accessibility lens into the delivery

Review and Selection: An Advisory Committee of United Way staff across the West will review all submissions and determine the final breakout sessions. In some cases when there are multiple sessions of similar content, we may reach out to see if you are open to combining your session with another proposal before we make a final decision, allowing us to strengthen learning opportunities for attendees. Furthermore, we may accept your proposal with conditions related to the final speaker roster or session format. Due to the high number of submissions, we are unable to provide feedback on specific sessions that are declined.

Please keep in mind that there is no honorarium for presenters, and all presenters must purchase a conference ticket (either via the normal process or through a conference sponsorship ticket). Selected presenters will be expected to attend a virtual pre-conference orientation, submit all materials by designated deadlines, and ensure presentations meet accessibility standards. All proposals must be submitted by the listed deadline: Sunday, March 8, 2026. Late or incomplete submissions may not be considered.

Submission Deadlines	
Application Due	March 8, 2026
Notification Date (range)	May 1-8, 2026

Closing Thoughts

Thank you for your interest in helping shape a meaningful and engaging conference for our attendees. We invite you to bring forward ideas that deepen connection, expand knowledge, spark collaboration, and support the success of United Ways across our network and communities. We look forward to reviewing your proposal and learning from the perspectives you bring.

If you have any questions or need any accessibility accommodations in submitting your session proposal, please reach out directly to Dave Sheldon dsheldon@unitedwaysca.org or Mikela Thomas mthomas@unitedwaysca.org and they will be happy to assist.



For your convenience, the application form questions are also available in a [google doc here](#) for your team to draft responses in preparation for submitting the form.