

Call for proposals guide

Illuminate 2026

Using this guide

This Call For Proposals guide offers a step-by-step approach to creating and submitting your session proposal. You can also use sections of this guide as a conversation starter with co-presenters to ensure that your approaches and contributions align with the best practices outlined below.

Once you have reviewed this guide and gathered all necessary information, complete the [call for proposals application](#).

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Where admission policy, strategy, and operations meet

Illuminate is the premier event for Common App member institutions, bringing together enrollment leaders and college admissions professionals from around the world. Join your colleagues to share best practices, access new research and data insights, and apply that knowledge to create a more equitable college admissions experience for all students.

Conference details

Illuminate 2026 will be held on June 3-5, 2026, in Charlotte, North Carolina at The Westin Charlotte. **Educational sessions will take place on June 4 and 5 of the conference.**

Call for proposals

Common App members have long been partners in shaping Illuminate programming. Following the success of our inaugural Call for Proposals last year, we are excited to continue this partnership and open a Call for Proposals for the 2026 conference. We invite you to propose and present educational sessions that align with our conference theme and address topics relevant to Common App members. These 50-minute presentations can be in the form of a lecture, roundtable, workshop, or panel discussion.

Illuminate 2026 theme: Driving the next era of access and innovation

Higher education provides more than a private benefit; it fuels the common good. Delivering on this value drives our work.

Collectively, Common App members are agents of opportunity. To meet today's unique challenges and pursue positive change, we must embrace bold action and adapt established practices. Technology, innovation, and partnerships are not simply drivers of efficiency; they are vehicles for advancing opportunity and adapting recruitment practices. By harnessing the possibilities of technology, we can better support students.

At Illuminate, we'll explore our work in relation to technology, opportunity, community, and each other. Building on Common App's legacy of 50 years of expanding access to higher education, we will work together to establish an unshakeable foundation for the next five decades.

In keeping with our theme, think about one or more of the following questions to inform your session proposal

- How do Common App’s products and services support and advance your work?
- What operational practices and strategies will enable efficiencies and success for learner pathways?
- How can Common App and its members continue to innovate and evolve to meet the needs and challenges of today's admissions climate?
- How can we leverage AI as an agent of optimization and evolution?

Presenter policies

If selected, each presenter will be asked to review and agree to the following:

Attendance and conference registration: All presenters, including session presenters, must register and attend Illuminate. If your session is selected for presentation at Illuminate, we will provide a registration discount code to all presenters. Travel and lodging are at the presenter’s expense.

Common App membership: A **Common App member** institution must employ the proposal owner/lead presenter.

Presenter limits: An individual may be listed in any number of proposals; however, it is our policy that an individual may present in no more than **two** conference sessions. The number of presenters listed in a proposal should reflect the needs of the format selected.

Publication materials: If your session proposal is accepted, your session title and abstract may be edited by the proposal evaluation committee and/or Common App staff

About submitting a proposal

Submission and selection timeline

November 15, 2025	Call for proposal application window opens
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Extended! January 21, 2026	Call for proposal application window closes
Mid-February 2026	Proposal review and selection <i>(Owners of selected proposals will confirm short description text with Common App at this stage.)</i>
March or April 2026 <i>TBD</i>	Presenter orientation
June 3-5	Illuminate 2026 in Charlotte, North Carolina

The call for proposals application

Be sure to have the following information ready when filling out the call for proposals application. For more information about specific topics, click on the links.

- **Title:** Make your title concise but relevant to your topic.
- **Presenter/panelist names and titles:** Who is presenting with you or being featured on your panel? (Note: we HIGHLY encourage you to partner with colleagues from your institution or other institutions with shared interests)
- **[Session type](#):** Choose the session type that best fits your topics: lecture/discussion, roundtable, panel discussion, or workshop.
- **Short Session Description:** The abstract is a brief (50–60 words) but eye-catching description of what the session plans to cover. Use your notes from the “[planning your session](#)” section to help inform your text.
- **[Learning objectives](#):** What will attendees learn during your session?
- **Session relevance:** How does your session tie into the theme of this year’s conference and [Common App’s goals and objectives](#)?

Strategies for success

- Ensure your research/topic ties in with the themes and goals of Illuminate 2026.
- Match your session topic with a timely, relevant issue occurring in the field.
- Provide interesting or controversial perspectives on your topic.

- Enlist presenters who bring different operational and institutional points of view.
- Explain what your presentation will cover in regard to the topic and problem presented.

Selection criteria

Proposals will be reviewed by the Programming and Events Advisory Committee, which is composed of individuals from Common App member institutions as well as Common App staff. Session proposals will be rated based on the following criteria:

- Connection to the conference theme or priorities
- Connection to Common App's goals and initiatives
- Relevance to current topics in the college admissions profession and/or higher education sector
- Clarity in session approach, content, and learning objectives
- Content and approach support learning objectives

Planning your session

Whether it is your first or 50th time proposing a session, it can be a process of figuring out how you want to present your topic to conference attendees!

No matter your experience level, here are some strategies to help you create a compelling session proposal for conference participants. You can use any part to help organize your thoughts or the thoughts of you and your co-presenters during the Call for Proposals application process and later if your proposal is selected for presentation at Illuminate.

What kind of presentation do you want to offer to attendees?

There are many different ways to present your topic to conference attendees. Think about your topic and goals for your session, and let that inform what format you want to use to present your session. Consider the following session types:

- **Lecture/discussion:** A lecture is a structured way to share information, ideas, or research findings with an audience at a formal gathering. They can cover a wide range of topics, such as research studies, case analyses, and theoretical

frameworks. This format should include points where the audience can contribute ideas and perspectives to the discussion.

- **Workshop:** The workshop format provides attendees with in-depth lessons, group activities, and real-world case studies to help advance a topic. Workshops often include activities that allow attendees to interact with one another to problem-solve and develop solutions they can take back to their home institutions.
- **Roundtable:** Roundtables consist of a short presentation, followed by discussion and feedback. Roundtable presenters should bring targeted questions to pose to others, in order to learn from and with those attending. Roundtables are an ideal format for an in-depth discussion on a particular topic.
- **Panel discussion:** A panel discussion is a structured conversation that brings together multiple experts or stakeholders to explore a specific topic, share their perspectives, and engage in lively discourse

There are, of course, other session formats and hybrid options that you might consider for your topic, based on what you are comfortable with and what best fits the goals and objectives of your session.

Create and share specific learning objectives

Learning objectives provide direction. They are clear statements of what learners will be able to know and do after your session. You can help yourself and your learners by grounding your learning objectives in action verbs. Here are some helpful examples based on *A revision of Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*. You will need these learning objectives when writing a proposal submission and when creating your presentation.

When you want learners to...	Use verbs such as...
Remember	Recognize, recall, identify, describe
Understand	Summarize, classify, clarify, predict, select
Apply	Respond, advise, conduct, use
Analyze	Distinguish, integrate, deconstruct, sequence
Evaluate	Check, determine, judge, reflect

Create	Generate, assemble, design, create, develop
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1. **Write three learning objectives for your session.**

By the end of this session, attendees will be able to....

2. **Describe three insights you plan to share during your session.**

Give attendees a reason to join you. You can generate excitement and pique curiosity by previewing highlights of your presentation.

3. **How does your session tie into the theme of this year's conference?**

With your presenters, think about how your topic ties into the theme of delivering value together.

4. **In what ways is your topic relevant to the partnership between Common App and its members?**