

# 2026 AEP Annual Convening



## CALL FOR BREAKOUT SESSION PROPOSALS

The Arts Education Partnership (AEP) at the Education Commission of the States (ECS) invites you to submit a proposal to share your work during a breakout session at the 2026 Annual Convening, **to be held in person from Sept. 1-4 in Jacksonville, FL**. Breakout sessions will focus on exploring programs and ideas to help arts and education leaders build their leadership capacity.

AEP will accept breakout session proposals through the online submission form for the 2026 Annual Convening until **Friday, April 10 at 5 p.m. PDT**. For questions or additional information, please email [Mary Dell'Erba](mailto:Mary.Dell'Erba@artseducationpartnership.org).

## About the 2026 AEP Annual Convening

Arts and education leaders will convene in Jacksonville, Florida **Sept. 1-4** to celebrate arts education and ask bold questions to advance our collective work. AEP defines arts education to include dance, folk and traditional arts, media arts, Native and Indigenous arts, music, theatre and visual arts that take place in school and community settings at all hours of the day.

The Annual Convening will feature a new, staggered format designed to build knowledge and make connections among state policymakers, arts and education funders and the broader AEP partner network.

- Sept. 1: Commissioners of Education Commission of the States and arts and education funders join for programming focused on building knowledge of arts education policies and systems.
- Sept. 2: Commissioners and funders are joined by AEP partners, affiliates, and arts education leaders to build connections and mutual understanding of roles and priorities.
- Sept. 3: Arts and education leaders move into deeper conversations around policy, programs and practices to advance arts education.
- Sept. 4: AEP and advocacy partners host a half day workshop to create action plans and discuss field-wide strategies and implementation.

## AEP's Commitment to Creating a Welcoming Event

AEP believes that everyone working in arts education has knowledge to share. We are actively trying to increase the visibility, accessibility and representation across demographic and role groups at the event. Our goal

is to create an environment where a wide range of **voices are represented and honored** in support of the learners we all serve.

To uphold this commitment, AEP will prioritize sessions that include at least one speaker who has not previously presented at an AEP event and offers a new and unique perspective to the field.

Prior to the proposal deadline, AEP will host an optional office hours on **Wednesday, April 1 from 3-4 p.m. EDT** to provide tips on creating a strong proposal and help develop ideas into a full proposal. AEP will also waive registration costs for all session hosts.

## About the Audience

The Annual Convening's primary audience includes leaders from the arts, education, business, research, cultural, government and philanthropic sectors. AEP defines "leaders" broadly, from people who have leadership roles — in name and in practice — in arts and education spaces to people who share the priority that all learners receive a high-quality arts education. The following list offers examples of those who have attended other AEP gatherings:

- AEP and ECS [partners](#) and [affiliates](#)
- Advocates and arts activists
- Business leaders
- Community leaders
- Educators, including certified teachers, administrators, community artists, teaching artists, higher education faculty and members of arts and cultural institutions who facilitate learning
- Families and caregivers
- Policymakers
- Private and public funders
- Researchers
- Service organizations

## Priority Content Areas

AEP welcomes proposals on a wide range of topics. We ask that you designate the topic area(s) that is most aligned with your session to help us balance our agenda, not to limit potential sessions. AEP will consider other session proposals that are not specific to these topics or examples.

- School based
- Community based
- Early care and education

- K-12
- Higher Ed
- Research
- Policy
- Practice

Sessions selected for Sept. 2 will be required to have a systems-level focus. AEP defines “systems change” as working to change how institutions behave, public attitudes, cultural norms, policy decisions and/or resource allocation in order to support equitable access to arts education for all learners, especially those that have historically been marginalized. Please indicate in the session worksheet how the session aligns with this definition.

## Important Dates

**March 9:** Call for proposals announced

**April 1:** Breakout Session Office Hours ([Click here](#) to register for this session)

**April 10:** Deadline for proposal submissions

**May 22:** Breakout session hosts notified

**June 23-25:** Breakout session host meetings with AEP

**Aug. 19:** Deadline for slides and supplemental materials to be added to the event app

**Sept. 1-4:** AEP Annual Convening

## Submission Checklist

- | Session Title
- | Session Description
- | Session Objectives
- | Host and Speaker Information
- | Session Plan Questions 1-6

## General Guidelines for Breakout Sessions

- All sessions are in person and allotted **75 minutes**.
- All sessions must have a designated **session organizer**. The session organizer is responsible for submitting the breakout session form, coordinating with hosts, keeping AEP staff informed of any changes

or challenges and meeting deadlines for submitting critical information.

- AEP will accept breakout session proposals through the [online submission form only](#). AEP will not accept proposals submitted in another format, including via email, to maintain a fair review process. AEP may be able to accommodate proposals submitted in another format (such as video) on a case-by-case basis. Please reach out to [Mary Dell'Erba](#) to discuss options.
- Breakout sessions are limited to **3 hosts**, including the session organizer. Reviewers will give preference to proposals that feature first-time hosts.
- AEP will notify session organizers about their proposal by **May 22**.
- Pre- and post-event survey results indicate that attendees are most interested in sessions that actively engage participation, incorporate opportunities for dialogue, make meaningful connections to next steps and allow opportunities for networking. Attendees are less interested in sessions that are focused on selling a product or service. Our review panel will be looking for evidence of engagement and dialogue in the review of proposals.
- The event will use the vFairs event app for in-person engagement. AEP will equip each room with a basic A/V set up including a laptop, projector, microphone and speaker. **Hosts** can send additional requests to [Mitra Chamanbahar](#) by July 17 for consideration.
- AEP staff are here to support you on any element of session design **as requested from June 20-Sept. 2**. Please reach out to [Mitra Chamanbahar](#) to schedule a time to connect.
- These sessions focus on shared learning and engagement among attendees and hosts. All sessions should minimize obstacles to participation provide opportunities for participants to actively engage in learning. AEP staff will support hosts during preparation calls.
- Rooms will be set up in round tables for eight. Alternative room setups will be considered upon request directly to [Mary Dell'Erba](#) by July 16.

## Host Requirements

- All hosts must be prepared to conduct their session on any day of the AEP Annual Convening (**Sept. 1-4**).
- All breakout session hosts must register for the convening by **July 17**. There is no registration cost for session hosts. Session hosts are responsible for all other travel costs.
- Session hosts are invited to participate in planning sessions with AEP staff on **June 23 and 25**. In these sessions we will share logistics, discuss engagement practices and offer time for hosts to ask questions and brainstorm with one another. AEP requests that hosts attend at least one session to ensure all necessary information is shared between our team and session hosts.
- All slides, references or other materials to be included on the event app are required to be submitted by **Aug. 19**.
- AEP and ECS are nonpartisan and committed to fair representation in all materials. We value open sharing across differences and will always prioritize the physical and emotional safety of attendees. To do this, we:
  - Will review session materials for messages that may be perceived as harmful.
  - Will engage hosts in a conversation about materials as needed.
  - Reserve the right to cancel a session if hosts are unwilling to make changes to support a welcoming and safe environment.
- Session hosts grant permission for AEP to distribute their supplemental resource materials on the AEP website and conference app. If hosts wish to distribute copyrighted information in supplemental materials, it is their responsibility to obtain necessary permissions. Such materials will be distributed only if the presenters submit them with the publisher's written permission attached. AEP will consider proposals on a case-by-case basis that highlight research in progress or research that is not publicly available.

## Proposal Evaluation and Selection

AEP and ECS staff will review all proposals and select the breakout sessions for the final Annual Convening program. AEP will make session proposal selections that are informed by the following criteria:

Minimum Requirements	Priority Preference
Learning objectives align to the session content and prepare participants to apply what they learn to their own work or contexts.	Objectives include language that indicates active learning, including but limited to: “design,” “evaluate,” “create,” “compare,” “connect,” “interpret”
Sessions focus on actionable learning, and proposals include a clear explanation about what will occur during the proposed session.	Specific strategies are identified for participants to contribute their own expertise and insight to the conversation.
At least one session host confirmed with passion or experience to share on the topic and a willingness to work with AEP to identify collaborators.	At least one host has not presented at a previous event. At least one host lives or works in Florida.
Sessions are topical and relevant.	Session topics align, build on, challenge or bring new perspective to the field.
Evidence that planner(s) have aimed to ensure that every participant can be successful and learn.	Planner(s) have offered specific examples of accessible practices and how they plan to make those practices integral to the learning experience.
A focus on systems change or building individual leadership capacity.	Connections made to how the attendee can implement new learning immediately and in the long term.
Youth focused.	Youth plan the session and/or serve as session host(s).

## About AEP and Education Commission of the States

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The Arts Education Partnership at Education Commission of the States is a national network of education, arts, business, cultural, government and philanthropic organizations dedicated to advancing arts education. The Arts Education Partnership has been supported by the National Endowment for the Arts and the U.S. Department of Education since 1995 and is administered by Education Commission of the States.

AEP is the nation's hub for arts and education leaders, building their leadership capacity to support students, educators and learning environments. Through research, reports, convenings and counsel, leaders gain knowledge and insights to ensure that all learners receive an excellent arts education.