

Call for proposals guide

Illuminate 2027



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 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

This year, Illuminate will be held on June 2-4, 2027, in Indianapolis, Indiana at The Westin Indianapolis. **Educational sessions will take place on June 3 and 4 of the conference.**

Call for proposals

Common App members have long been partners in shaping Illuminate programming. 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.

In the next section, learn about our theme and consider how your session can make connections and address the issues that you and your peers are facing in the profession.

Illuminate 2027 theme: *Calculated Leaps: What's Next in Admissions and Enrollment?*

Higher education isn't just shifting, it's being redrawn. Meeting this moment takes more than reacting to today's pressures; it demands actively shaping tomorrow. To thrive, enrollment leaders must move from managing friction to building future-ready capability, making mission-aligned strategic moves that ensure institutional strength and student success.

At Illuminate, join Common App and a network of visionary peers to explore the bold ideas, real-world data, and game-changing innovations defining our field. Together, we will focus on what matters next:

- **Next-Gen Tools:** Harnessing new technologies and our unified app experience to cut friction, boost efficiency, and deepen applicant connections.
- **A Steady Compass:** Navigating complex regulatory, legislative, and compliance shifts with clarity and confidence.
- **Equitable Pathways:** Dismantling barriers and launching bold mission aligned initiatives that build diverse, sustainable enrollment pipelines.
- **Connected Ecosystems:** Forging powerful partnerships across K–12, higher education, and the modern workforce.

The future won't wait. Join us at Illuminate to make the calculated leaps—
together—that will define the next era of college access.

Presenter policies

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

- **Common App membership:** A **Common App member** institution must employ the proposal owner/lead presenter at the time of submission and at the time of the conference.
- **Attendance and conference registration:** All presenters, including session presenters, must register for the full conference (June 2-4, 2027). 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.**
- **Presenter limits:** It is our policy that an individual may submit and/or 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

October 2026	Call for proposal application opens
December 18, 2026	Call for proposal application closes
January 2027	Proposal review and selection
Late January/ February 2027	Notify selected proposal owners - confirm short description
April 2027	Presenter orientation

May 2027	Presentation development and submission
June 2027	Illuminate 2027 in Indianapolis, IN

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.
- **[Learning objectives](#):** What will attendees learn during your session? At least 2 objectives are required for the application.
- **[Participant engagement](#):** What approaches or activities do you anticipate in your session that will achieve your learning objectives and provide members the opportunity to learn and share ideas?
- **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
- 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 how your session will be organized and how you will incorporate engagement elements into your session.

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 to figure out how you want to present your topic to conference attendees!

No matter your experience level, here are some questions 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. ***This section is provided in case you need support as you write your proposal and plan your session.***

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.

What do you want participants to learn from your session?

Learning objectives define what attendees will know or be able to do after your session. For clarity, ground these objectives in action verbs. Refer to this [adaptation of Bloom's Taxonomy](#) to help frame your proposal and guide your presentation.

Examples

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- **Identify** key competencies and skills needed for middle managers to advance into leadership positions in enrollment management.
- **Evaluate** the emerging uses of AI in counseling platforms and application environments.

For more tips on how to use Bloom's Taxonomy to create learning objectives, please refer to this [resource](#) from the University of Arkansas.

When filling out the application form, include at least 2 learning objectives.

What insights do you plan to share?

Why should attendees choose your session? Think about the unique perspective or fresh insights you can bring to your topic. This reflection will help you draft a compelling and concise session description for your proposal.

How will you engage participants during the session?

Members consistently highlight that interactive learning and attendee engagement are what make Illuminate educational sessions stand out.

The type of session you choose (e.g.; lecture, roundtable, workshop or panel discussion) informs some of your approach, but also think about how you can add engagement into your session.

- Links to articles or whitepapers that you can share pre or post-session
- Live audience polling
- “Turn and Talk”
- Case study problem solving
- Table discussions and brainstorming
- Video clips

Use engagement tactics that feel the most comfortable and accessible for you as a presenter and your audience.