



Rocky Mountain Land Use Institute
UNIVERSITY OF DENVER

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Guidelines & Criteria

WESTERN PLACES | WESTERN SPACES

2026 CONFERENCE • MARCH 4-6, 2026 • DENVER, CO



This year marks the 35th anniversary of the Rocky Mountain Land Use Institute, the 100th Anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark zoning case *Euclid v. Ambler*, and the 250th anniversary of our nation.

As we look back and all around in order to look forward, we can't help but think that rock legends David Bowie and Queen had it right:

This is ourselves...under pressure.

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IMPORTANT DATES

The Rocky Mountain Region is one of breathtaking beauty, vast potential, and a dynamic future—but for all its promise, our region is undeniably under immense stress. Our communities are experiencing an unprecedented confluence of forces. Rapid population growth continues to reshape our landscape, bringing with it an urgent housing affordability crisis that challenges the very fabric of our communities. This relentless expansion places our infrastructure at risk, from overstretched roads, to aging water systems, to energy systems that are inadequate to meet future demand.

The stark realities of water scarcity and escalating wildfire risk also underscore how profoundly our environment is under pressure. We are forced to confront the tension between continuing traditional development patterns and adapting to a hotter, drier future, demanding innovative policies for conservation and climate resilience.

But the pressures aren't just from increased physical and environmental demands. Our unique system of federalism means land use decisions are constantly under pressure from competing levels of government. The inherent tension between state and federal mandates and the bedrock principle of local home rule create a complex arena of fierce debate.

Adding to this, the social fabric of our communities is under pressure. The urban-rural divide continues to widen, creating distinct planning needs and highlighting the challenge of executing regional solutions while ensuring equitable development and genuine representation across all of our diverse communities. Meanwhile, many of our traditional public engagement processes are failing to foster truly inclusive and democratic deliberation, allowing all voices to shape the future of their places.

For 35 years, the Rocky Mountain Land Use Institute has been at the forefront of exploring these complex issues. Our 2026 Western Places | Western Spaces conference will delve into the profound pressures our communities face, dissect their underlying dichotomies, and collectively seek the innovative, collaborative, and sustainable solutions that our region so desperately needs.

Plan to join us on the University of Denver campus on March 4-6, 2026 to contribute to the conversation.

Learn more about our conference tracks & topics below:

ABOUT THE CONFERENCE

RMLUI's annual *Western Places | Western Spaces* conference explores growth and development issues facing communities in the Rocky Mountain region—from large cities to small towns—as well as concerns about managing/preserving the West's natural resources and heritage.

Each year, the event serves as *the* place for land use & development professionals in the West to share knowledge, resources, and to network. With four hundred attendees annually, this event helps define and influence the West's land use and development future.

The conference attracts people from across the country, but most attendees are from the Rocky Mountain West states: Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming.

Our conference attendees typically represent national, state, and local government agencies, private planning and design firms, law firms, real estate and development companies, research, policy, and academic institutions, foundations and nonprofit organizations.

The conference takes place at the University of Denver campus on a Thursday and Friday in early March, and includes a keynote, a lunch plenary, panel sessions, and occasional off-site tours.

2026 TOPIC TRACKS

Growth, Housing Affordability & Community Character

- Growth v. Contraction
- Affordability v. Market Forces
- Historic Preservation v. Development
- Growth v. Contraction

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion

The last few years have shed a spotlight on the embedded inequities in urban planning and land use. How do we ensure that everyone has a voice in the decisions that impact their communities?

Professional Responsibility & Ethics

(For professional planners and attorneys).

Environmental Sustainability & Climate Adaptation

- Energy Demand, Reliability & Affordability v. Development
- Hazard Risk Mitigation v. Development
- Water Scarcity v. Development
- Habitat Protection v. Development
- Climate Resilience v. Existing Infrastructure Development

Federalism & The Role of Government

- State Preemption v. Local Control
- Federal Mandates v. State & Local Control
- Intergovernmental Coordination v. Urban / Rural divide Federalism & The Role of Government

Democracy, Deliberation & Community Engagement

- Traditional Governance v. Inclusive Deliberation
 - Democratic Deliberation v. New Data & Technologies
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PREPARING YOUR PROPOSAL

Proposals should be submitted using the [online form](#). We recommend that you draft your proposal offline first, and then copy/paste your final responses into the online form (there is no way to save a working draft online and return to it later). For reference/offline drafting, you can download a sample Word document of the online questions [here](#).

For **sessions** (including panels, roundtables, tours, and workshops), be prepared with the following information: title, description, outline, learning objectives, and speaker information. You should also be prepared to describe how your session supports the conference theme and highlighted topics, as well as how you will engage with participants during your session.

The **title** and **description** of your session will be used not only in evaluating your proposal, but also for marketing materials if your session is accepted. Titles should catch the reader's attention, and the description should let the audience know what the session will cover. For examples, please refer to programs from past conferences on our website.

The session **outline** provides the Selection Committee with a more in-depth look at how your session will be structured, the topics you plan to address, and the issues that each speaker will cover. You should also include any points that help your session provide continuing education credits. Use a simple format like a basic bulleted list.

Learning objectives describe what lessons participants will take away from the sessions. These are used in obtaining continuing education credits for the conference, but also are used in evaluation criteria.

Moderators and speakers should be able to demonstrate content expertise in the topic, as well as be engaging to the audience. Session panelists should be diverse and be prepared to discuss how tools and methodologies can be transferred to other cities and towns. Individual speakers should consider what additional value they can bring to an existing panel and what topics they would like to discuss.

Please adhere to the following guidelines when preparing your proposal:

- Proposals are due by **September 6, 2025**.
- Please review the Western Places | Western Spaces conference theme and the highlighted topics to make sure your session is a good fit for the conference.
- Comply with word limitations.
- Limit panel/roundtable-style sessions to one moderator & three speakers.
- Panels & roundtables should present a variety of perspectives, and represent different geographic, ethnic, and gender diversity.

Please provide all of the information requested. Incomplete proposals will not be considered.

WAYS TO APPLY

Panels & Roundtables

These sessions are 90 minutes total in length, including 30 minutes for audience Q&A and engagement. They are typically comprised of 4 presenters (2 to 3 speakers plus a moderator). While we are primarily looking for sessions that address the theme and topics of this year's conference, sessions could also focus on other "hot topic" issues.

Workshops

Workshop sessions are typically a half-day to full-day and are held on the Wednesday before the full conference (workshops this year will be on March 4, 2026). Workshops are designed to provide participants with a deep-dive into practice-focused topics or training. Examples of past workshops topics include Affordable Housing, Real Estate & Gas Regulation, Exemption of Oil

Off-Site Tours

Off-site tours showcase projects, themes (e.g. housing, mobility, or urban gardens), or new developments. Typically, they are 3.5 to 4 hours long, including transportation time to/from the site. RMLUI provides/arranges tour transportation. Tours can be concentrated in one location or visit several locations centered around a common theme.

Speakers

A speaker nomination is a good option for those who may not be able to develop a full session but could lend their expertise to fill out an existing panel. RMLUI will work with session organizers to add these speakers and increase depth and diversity of existing sessions.

SELECTION CRITERIA

RMLUI seeks to provide a broad selection of offerings focused on the conference theme, highlighting innovative developments, and covering the topics listed on the next page.

Sessions are required to have multiple presenters who should represent geographic diversity as well as different view points.

RMLUI provides continuing education credits for legal, planning, and real estate professionals. If applicable, we ask session organizers to provide information on how their session meets continuing education criteria on their submission form.

Sessions should strive to:

- Provide useful and practical knowledge participants can use in their own work.
- Address current issues trending in the land use and development communities.
- Present innovative tools and case studies of current projects.
- Offer diverse perspectives with speakers from across the region with different perspectives and backgrounds.
- Engage the audience in a meaningful way.

Interested in becoming a **2026 CONFERENCE SPONSOR?**

Our annual conference wouldn't be possible without the generous support of our sponsors, whose contributions help fund our educational programming and conference activities.

Conference sponsorship provides visibility and underscores your company's commitment to sustainable, informed, and ethical land use & development practices.

Equally important are our Aspen sponsors, who provide in-kind marketing and promotional support for our event.

For more information on sponsorship opportunities, please contact: [Cindy Lane](#) or [Susan Daggett](#).

NEXT STEPS

Apply Online

Applications must be submitted [online](#) by September 6, 2025.

If you have questions or issues applying online, please contact us (see below).

Proposal Review

The Selection Committee will review all complete proposals and make a final decision by (tentatively) late September. RMLUI reserves the right to make changes to sessions, including adding speakers and/or combining sessions with similar content.

Timeline

Aug. 6, 2025: RFP Opens

Sept. 6, 2025: [Proposals Due](#)

Late Sept. 2025: Proposal Decisions

Nov. 2025: Registration Opens

March 4-6, 2026: Conference

Questions?

Please contact:

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or

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