Western Academic Leadership Forum

Call for Proposals for 2026 Annual Meeting
Submission Deadline: Friday, November 21, 2025

This Year's Theme: *Facing Complexity, Finding Solutions*
April 1-3, 2026 | University of New Mexico | Albuquerque, New Mexico

The Western Academic Leadership Forum (Forum) is thrilled to invite you to join us at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, New Mexico, on April 1-3, 2026, for the Forum's Annual Meeting.

The Forum is a membership organization housed within the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) that serves as a collaborative network of academic leaders across the WICHE region, which includes Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaiʻi, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, Wyoming, and the U.S. Pacific Territories and Freely Associated States (Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of Palau, and American Samoa). The chief academic officers, provosts, vice presidents, and academic affairs administrators at public and private four-year institutions, related systems offices, and state agencies serve as the institutional liaison for the institutional membership. The Forum serves as a space to exchange ideas and information, share resources and expertise, and generate solutions to the range of contemporary challenges facing postsecondary education in the West.

As higher education continues to navigate evolving challenges — ranging from a shifting policy landscape and workforce demands to complex enrollment trends and technological disruption — this gathering will provide a space for thoughtful dialogue, strategic insight, and collaborative problem-solving. Together, we'll explore bold ideas and practical solutions to address the dynamic situations we face as academic leaders and chart a path forward for our institutions and communities.

We invite academic leaders, researchers, and administrators to submit session proposals that align with the annual meeting's theme with special emphasis on actionable takeaways for attendees. Proposal submissions are not limited to members of the Forum nor members of the WICHE region.

For any questions related to the Forum Annual Meeting or proposal submissions, please contact: Nicholas Fuselier, Director of Academic Partnerships, Learning, and Development via email at nfuselier@wiche.edu.

Session Types:

- **Lightning Session** (15 minutes): Do you have an idea or promising practice that you're eager to share and discuss in a short-format session? Our lightning sessions offer the perfect platform to showcase your expertise in 15 minutes. These fast-paced sessions are ideal for delivering concise and impactful content that will leave participants energized and inspired.

- **Presentation or Workshop** (40 minutes + a 10-minute Q&A): Take center stage with a presentation or workshop, which allows you to delve into your subject matter, engage the audience, and leave a lasting impression. From thought-provoking discussions to practical demonstrations, your presentation or workshop should offer valuable insights, actionable takeaways, and plenty of opportunities for attendee interaction.

- **Panel Discussion** (40 minutes + a 10-minute Q&A): Join with 2-3 fellow experts for a dynamic panel discussion that explores key themes, challenges, and opportunities facing colleges and universities today. Panel discussions provide a platform for divergent perspectives, lively dialogue, and collaborative problem-solving designed to inspire, inform, and engage the audience in insightful discourse.

- **Case Study Roundtables** (50 minutes): Consider the range of contemporary challenges facing higher education today (perhaps a challenge facing your own campus) and design a case study to submit for roundtable discussion. These roundtables offer an interactive forum where participants will examine real-world challenges faced by institutions. Each table will focus on a specific case, encouraging collaborative discussion, strategy-sharing, and solution-building. This format fosters practical insight and peer-to-peer learning in an active, small-group setting.

Desired Topics:

- **Responding to Complex Challenges:** Higher education is navigating a rapidly shifting landscape shaped by complex and interconnected challenges, including significant changes in the federal and state policy landscape, evolving expectations related to accreditation, and shifting enrollment trends. New funding models are emerging alongside ongoing budgetary pressures, while the growing influence of artificial intelligence is transforming everything from curriculum design to administrative decision-making. This moment demands thoughtful, collaborative responses that both address immediate concerns while also laying the groundwork for long-term institutional resilience.

- **(Re)Building Public Trust in Higher Education:** Sustaining trust in higher education requires a renewed focus on articulating the full return on investment — one that includes an emphasis on the social mobility of college graduates while also highlighting the range of civic and societal benefits of a robust postsecondary education system. By effectively communicating these outcomes to prospective students and their families, as well as legislators and the general public, we can demonstrate how higher education supports the achievements of the individual person and improves the broader community.

- **Attending to the Changing Needs of Students:** Today's college students bring a range of experiences, expectations, and needs that challenge traditional models of higher education. To support their success — before, during, and after college — institutions must adapt by rethinking degree structures, expanding recruitment beyond first-time, full-time students, and reaching those individuals with some college but no credential. As conversations around affordability, student debt, and the evolution of the bachelor's degree gain urgency, so too does the need to balance academic freedom with thoughtful approaches to student expression. Meeting these changing needs requires a deepening of our commitment to student-centered innovation.

- **Solving Problems through Effective Organizational Leadership:** Effective organizational leadership is essential to solving the complex problems facing higher education today. From managing budget cuts and navigating intentional de-growth to ensuring data security and legal compliance, leaders must make strategic decisions that prioritize long-term sustainability and institutional resilience. Strong, mission-driven leadership grounded in clarity, adaptability, and collaboration will be the cornerstone of higher education's ability to thrive amid uncertainty.

Proposals Content:

    I.   Lead Presenter Name, Title, and Institutional/Organizational Affiliation

    II.   Co-Presenter(s) Name(s), Title(s), and Institutional/Organizational Affiliation(s)

    III.   Title (no more than 15 words)

    IV.   Session Abstract (no more than 50 words): Please note that this will be published in Annual Meeting materials.

    V.   Session Description (no more than 250 words): Please describe the session including how the session connects to the meeting theme and a plan for interacting with session attendees.

    VI.   Session Learning Outcomes (no more than 25 words each): Please outline 1-3 learning outcomes associated with your session.

    VII.   Session Type: Please indicate your preferred session type
        a. Lightning Session
        b. Presentation or Workshop
        c. Panel Discussion
        d. Case Study Roundtable

    VIII. Session's Overarching Topic(s): Please indicate which overarching topics your session addresses.
        a. Responding to Contemporary and Complex Challenges
        b. (Re)Building Public Trust in Higher Education
        c. Attending to Today's Students' Changing Needs
        d. Solving Problems through Effective Organizational Leadership

Proposal Timeline:

The deadline to submit proposals is Friday, November 21, 2025, by 11:59 PM MTN. Decisions on proposals will be sent via email to the lead presenter during the week of December 15, 2025.

Required Meeting Registration:

If selected, everyone listed as a presenter in the proposal is expected to attend and present in person at the 2026 Annual Meeting. All presenters are responsible for paying the appropriate registration fees. Please ensure that all presenters included in your proposal are aware of this information.

Criteria for Proposal Submission:

- **Clear Learning Outcomes:** Clearly articulate the learning outcomes participants can expect to achieve by the end of the session.
- **Participant Experience:** Describe how participants will actively participate in the session, including any group activities, discussions, or exercises. Emphasize the experiential learning elements that will make the session engaging and memorable.
- **Solution-Driven:** Aligned with our theme, please discuss solutions that are responsive to contemporary and complex challenges facing colleges and universities.
- **Expertise of Presenters:** Highlight the qualifications and expertise of the session presenters, demonstrating their ability to facilitate an engaging and impactful learning experience. Include any relevant credentials, experience, or accolades.
- **Relevance to Audience:** Ensure that the session topic is relevant and timely for our audience, which consists of professionals seeking practical skills and strategies to enhance their work within their campuses and organizations.