



**COLLECTIVE  
IMPACT FORUM**



# **2026 Collective Impact Action Summit Session Submission Recommendations**



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# 1. Summit Overview

## Collective Impact Action Summit (aka., CIAS) (April 14-16, 2026)

- **April 14:** 12pm – 5pm ET
- **April 15:** 12pm – 5pm ET
- **April 16:** 12pm – 4:30pm ET

The Summit is a virtual event, and the time zone the Summit schedule uses is **Eastern Time (US & Canada)**.

Prior to submitting your session, please make note of what time the Summit will be for you and your session team.



# 1. Summit Overview, Continued

## Collective Impact Action Summit

- **Size:** 800-1,000+ Attendees
- **Summit Audience:**
  - Majority practitioners working in cross-sector collaboration in some form. On average, 30% working on education and youth issues (early childhood, cradle to career, etc.), 30% in health (public, physical, behavioral, etc.), 30% related to community development, and 10% on other issues like affordable housing, arts, environment, etc.
  - Most attendees are from the nonprofit sector.
  - Most join from the U.S. and Canada, and about 10% from elsewhere. Participants will join from a variety of time zones, including during the day, early morning, or late at night / middle of the night.
- **Structure:** The Summit will be a mix of plenary keynotes, as well as simultaneous breakout sessions.
- **Event and Session Platform:** We use **Whova** for our event platform (both website and app). Attendees access sessions via the Whova site. Breakout sessions will be held in **Zoom meeting**.



## 2. Summit Vibe

The Collective Impact Action Summit vibe is very, **“Show up as you are. We are all here to learn from each other.”**

This means:

- Kids of speakers may guest-star in the back or foreground of keynotes
- Pets wandering around in the back or foreground of a session
- Attendees may join from work, home, or while on the bus or on a walk.

We are all here to learn and share with each other, so this is all fine with us. This is all part of the our collective “online Action Summit Vibe.”



## 3. Session Types

There are three types of breakout sessions for the Summit that are part of the Call for Sessions:

- 1) 60-minute How-to Session:** Focusing on how-to “nuts and bolts” advice for collaboratives related to the practice area you are focusing on; maximum of 4 presenters, including moderator/session lead.
- 2) 60-minutes Tools and Techniques session:** Provide attendees a chance to practice using a specific tool or technique that they can adapt for use in their own collaborative. **All tools and techniques must be available for free or have a free version**, rather than proprietary tools only for purchase or subscription; maximum of 2 presenters, including moderator.
- 3) 30-Minute “Stories of Change” Spotlight Talks sessions:** Share a specific story of change or spotlighting a specific concept that has seen progress in your work. The story or talk should demonstrate progress made on the issue. The format will be 20 minutes for the story and 10 minutes for audience Q&A; maximum of 2 presenters, including a moderator/interviewer if used.



## 4. Session Practice Areas

The Action Summit will focus on six practice areas for breakout sessions. Choose one practice area for your session submission.

- 1) **Community Engagement**
- 2) **Data and Learning**
- 3) **Fundraising and Sustaining Momentum**
- 4) **Narrative Change**
- 5) **Policy and Advocacy**
- 6) **Technology and AI**

Even if your topic overlaps with multiple practice areas, choose and focus on one practice area for your session submission.

Please see our full [Call for Sessions](#) for descriptions of each practice area and examples.



## 5. Considerations for Session Design

- We are using **Zoom meeting** for breakout sessions.
- **Audience-size can vary from 25-100 attendees per session**, and averages 50 attendees. When planning your submission design, consider that average number joining your session and how that affects your design.
- **Design your session for the “main room” only – we are not using small “breakout room” discussion groups.** This means activities will also be in the main room.
- **Try to save time for Q&A.** We normally recommend between 10-15 minutes of Q&A for a 60-minute session or 5-10 minutes for a 30-minute session. You can ask folks to raise their hands if they have questions and come off mute. Or you can ask folks to drop questions into the meeting’s Q&A section. There is also zoom chat, but that can get very busy so can be hard to track questions.
- **Include practice time if relevant:** If sharing a tool or technique, it is helpful to include practice time for folks to try on their own or include techniques like role play in front of the group for folks to understand how to use the tool.





## 6. Recommendations for a Successful Session

We survey attendees after every Collective Impact Action Summit, and these recommendations are based on our experience organizing the event and participant feedback:

### What Works Well:

- 1- Sharing concrete, practical, and real-world examples:** The Summit audience is majority practitioners working in collaboratives and they are hungry for real world examples, practices, tools, templates, and stories.
- 2- Don't skip on the "How":** Many attendees are beyond "why collaborate together" and are deep in the "how do we do this better?" Sharing how you are doing the work is very important and what folks are looking for the most.
- 3- Your audience is from a variety of issues:** Even if your work is focused on education or health, please know that your audience is broader than that. The most successful sessions speak to that broader audience.
- 4- Don't be afraid of "hard stories":** Folks appreciate realness, including how the work is hard, or if things don't always work. They appreciate hearing what you learned and how you moved forward after.



## 6. Recommendations for a Successful Session, Continued

### What Works Well continued...

**5 - The CIF Audience is multi-issue.** The unifying factor is that they are looking for **best practices** around collaboration.

When designing your session, a good exercise is to look at the design and content of your session and consider this prompt:

“In your audience, there are 5 people. One focuses on education. One focuses on public health. One focuses on environmental issues. One works on community development, and one works on affordable housing. Four are from different parts of the U.S. and one person is from outside the U.S.

Consider the collaborative practices, stories, and recommendations you are sharing in your session to this group. How would you share with them in a way that they can each take things back to their respective collaboratives and communities?”



## 6. Recommendations for a Successful Session, Continued

### What to avoid:

- 1- Being a commercial:** Audience members strongly dislike being “sold” to, including an overly-rosy or packaged story of collaboration. They want **authentic stories** of the work, and that usually includes the good, the bad, the hard, what failed, what was learned, what do you recommend, etc. Steer away from overly-sanitized or “pretty packaged” case studies of the work.
- 2- Selling services or products.** Sessions are not allowed to be facades to sell products, trainings, services, or software. Audiences call it out every time in our surveys. **Sessions that appear to sell will not be accepted.**
- 3- Too much jargon:** Understand you have a broad audience and aim to reduce/remove jargon; we encourage you to speak plainly and use clear language in your submission.
- 4- Your session submission does not have clear, easy to understand outcomes.** Remember that the Summit is supporting an audience that wants clear, actionable outcomes or resources from sessions. Make it easy to understand what audience members will gain from your session.



## 6. Recommendations for a Successful Session, Continued

### What to avoid continued...

**5- Not having your session plan included in your submission:** Share in detail how you will use your time and what the audience experience will be. Remember, sessions are in the main room only with no small breakout groups.

**6- Putting too much in your session design:** A 60 or 30-minute session can only fit so much. Take a realistic look at what you can fit, including audience Q&A or if using tools, time for audience members to try a tool. Prioritize the audience experience and what you want them to take away in your design.

**7. Submitting a session from an issue-specific conference that has not been updated for this multi-issue audience.** Understandably, some folks will submit sessions that have been at other conferences. We want to emphasize that the CIAS audience is **multi-issue**, and we strongly recommend updating your session to reflect that mixed audience. They will appreciate the effort and will be able to connect more to your session. If a session looks like it is made for another conference without reflecting the CIAS audience and their needs, the submission will not be selected.



# 7. How to Submit Your Session

1. Visit our [Call for Sessions page](#) on our website.
2. If needed, download a [copy of the questions](#) that you can use before formally submitting via our online form.
3. **By October 17, 2025**, submit your session in the [Online Form](#).
4. **Fill out each section of the form. DO NOT SKIP THE FIRST PAGE. This is the Session Organizer contact page and is critical for your submission.** Submissions with no session organizer listed will not be selected. Do not forget the session organizer contact information like email and phone. No contact information = session not accepted.
5. **By December 19, 2025**, all session organizers will be notified of their session status. After this date, if you don't see a message, please check your spam folder or reach out to [tracy.Timmons-gray@collectiveimpactforum.org](mailto:tracy.Timmons-gray@collectiveimpactforum.org) to inquire about your status.



## 8. Due Dates and Next Steps

- **August 18 – October 17, 2025 – [Call for Session Open](#)**
- **October 17, 2025** – Last day to submit sessions.
- **October – December 2025** – Session Review by CIAS Team.
- **By December 19, 2025** – All session organizers notified of their submission status.
- **By January 9, 2026** – Selected Sessions confirm their interest in joining the 2026 Collective Impact Action Summit.
- **January – April 2026** – Session teams prep their sessions.
- **Week of April 14-16, 2026 – 2026 Collective Impact Action Summit!**



# Have Other Questions?

For questions about planning your Summit session, please reach out to Tracy Timmons-Gray at [tracy.timmons-gray@collectiveimpactforum.org](mailto:tracy.timmons-gray@collectiveimpactforum.org)