

Call for Session Proposals Guide

The Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU) is a member-based nonprofit championing better design of cities and towns to improve lives and strengthen communities for all. For over thirty years, CNU has been the leading organization in reforming city-building across the country, gathering the broad spectrum of practitioners and advocates who share our mission. CNU is dedicated to making the design of cities, towns, and neighborhoods a part of how we respond to complex societal challenges, realizing their full potential to expand the social, economic, and environmental opportunities available to all members of each community. By highlighting effective design principles and lowering barriers to change, CNU amplifies the grassroots power of our thousands of members to build and rebuild their communities in ways that improve sustainability, increase accessibility, and promote equity.

The practice of New Urbanism demonstrates that the built environment is capable of offering profound social, economic, and environmental benefits. Built on the principles of our Charter, New Urbanism is more than a set of design guidelines or policy recommendations. It is an intersectional way of practicing urbanism - *of building community* - that requires policy, design, and development to all play a role in achieving our shared vision for the future.

The annual Congress is an international gathering of our multidisciplinary cohort, but it is also a core programmatic effort of CNU, providing an opportunity for our attendees to convene, to educate, and to collaborate in service of a world where cities, towns, and neighborhoods are intentionally designed to foster community, preserve the natural environment, and improve the lives of all people.

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About CNU34.Northwest Arkansas

The Impact of New Urbanism in a Growing Region

Northwest Arkansas, comprising the cities of Fayetteville, Springdale, Rogers, Bentonville, and nearly thirty other smaller communities, is a region that already embodies the spirit and principles of New Urbanism. The region boasts what might be the highest concentration of professionals in the planning, development, and design communities who are proponents of New Urbanist principles, and this collective expertise has fostered a local community of practice committed to sustainable growth, smart urban planning, and the creation of walkable, livable spaces. Consistently ranking as one of the most desirable places to live, growth projections make NWA one of the fastest-growing regions in the nation. This rapid expansion presents unique opportunities as well as challenges that align with the complete vision that the Charter describes and the solutions that New Urbanists offer.

As a Congress host region, NWA is a place in motion – a community at a critical inflection point and ready for transformation. The region is economically robust and continuously diversifying, thanks in large part to the presence of global corporations like Walmart leading urban investment and driving economic success. Local corporate success has attracted global talent, raising expectations for design excellence and placemaking. Alongside, significant private philanthropic investments support the arts, education, healthcare, and lifestyle improvements, contributing to the region's quality of life.

With the right guidance and implementation of New Urbanist principles across the entire Transect, NWA has the opportunity to build a smart, sustainable, and walkable future. Alternatively, the region faces the risk of succumbing to sprawl and its associated costs. The future of NWA depends on strategic planning at the regional level that preserves and enhances lower-intensity urbanism while fostering the thoughtfully-placed density required to make transit viable and complete walkable communities.

The influence that attendees deliver through their contributions at CNU34 will test whether a place like Northwest Arkansas and its mix of cities, towns, and natural landscapes can grow in a way that is intentional, connected, and lasting. The region is asking the New Urbanism for a way to grow that balances beauty, practicality, and long-term value to create something that is deeply livable and even replicable. This year's Congress represents the kind of audacious work that only New Urbanism would attempt to demonstrate: that a fast-growing region in the middle of the country can develop wisely, beautifully, and with public benefit in mind. NWA is an excellent case study for sustainable urban development, and CNU is arriving at the exact right moment to help this growing region get it right.

The CNU34 FOCUS

Building the Future of Neighborhoods, Towns, and Cities: Applying the Transect Across a Region

The Charter recognizes the regional interdependence between urban and rural environments. In partnership with the diverse communities across Northwest Arkansas, CNU34 will focus on applying the Transect to improve how regions expand, helping our host region maintain the unique character of its cities and towns, agricultural lands, and natural landscapes as it harnesses growth.

In the thirty years since the Charter was signed, the Congress for the New Urbanism has advocated for neighborhoods, towns, and cities that are intentionally shaped by local history, climate, market, and building practice. As any metropolitan region grows and evolves, the quality of these urban places – and the quality of life that they provide – is directly influenced by their relationships to the land, and to the culture of development found across the region. So when New Urbanists come to *CNU34.Northwest Arkansas*, we will bring our strategic understanding of the wide range of urban conditions that support community-building as we Focus on applying the Transect to shape the growth of the neighborhoods, towns, and cities across NWA. With our impact in NWA, we will honor the Charter's guidance: investment in multiple centers and clear edges; supporting neighborhoods, districts, and corridors as building blocks for urbanism; and a regional approach offering real choices for housing, transportation, and opportunity.

As a tool for understanding urbanism, the Transect arranges the elements of urbanism in useful order by classifying them from rural to urban. Every urban element finds a place within its continuum. A street is more urban than a road; a curb is more urban than a swale; a brick wall is more urban than a wooden fence; and a formal row is more urban than a cluster of trees. This ordering tool can radically help shape decision-making, when applied to a metropolitan region undergoing rapid change, because a properly ordered urban-to-rural regional approach helps ensure that every community member can enjoy lifestyle choices across the variety of urban places. The Transect empowers design and redesign of neighborhoods, towns, and cities representing the best benefits that the new urbanist vision offers.

The Problem Space: The Growth of Neighborhoods, Towns, and Cities Across a Region

In a rapidly-growing region like Northwest Arkansas, a well-coordinated approach to the development and redevelopment of the built environment is fundamental to ensuring that growth is healthy, sustainable, humane, and protects the uniquely valuable character of the surrounding natural environment. As communities face important decisions about their built future, they will need to do so in a way that respects context and scale with each new development and redevelopment. The Charter of the New Urbanism describes the breadth of principles that apply to the full rural-to-urban spectrum of development, and when applied effectively, these principles ensure that every community possesses

its own authentic identity, from the most rural farming village to the most urban downtown core. The ordering device that the New Urbanism uses to demonstrate this revolutionary idea is the Transect.

In Northwest Arkansas and similar fast-growing regions across the country, the practical and political constraints in any given community push growth pressures to the rural edges of the region, simultaneously ignoring healthy opportunities for ordered density while eradicating rural ways of life. The Transect offers a powerful tool for strategic community-building that establishes an ambitious yet rational vision for change. In reforming existing sprawl, application of the Transect offers a clear way to redevelop autocentric conditions and the harms it causes. In the development of new settlements, the Transect provides an approach for urban design that will possess qualities associated with the best of old urbanism. NWA faces urbanization pressures that many growing regions can identify with, where economic progress and migrating populations can clash with the need to preserve nature and farmland.

At CNU34, New Urbanists will use application of the Transect to help small towns think critically about the future they want to create through the ways they guide land use. We will provide tools and resources that embolden cities to manage urban growth by protecting and expanding the quality of life that makes the region so attractive to growth in the first place.

The Transect in Context:

The Transect as the Focus for CNU34 will guide Congress impact by connecting the new urbanist community of practice with the local building community in ways that will effect change in NWA:

- Urban designers and architects will bring their best examples of blocks, streets, and buildings that demonstrate how careful design creates complete built environments that put people first.
- Planners and real estate developers will share their best strategies for regulating, financing, and implementing built new urbanism that is proven to be both profitable and purpose-driven.
- Transportation experts will offer their valuable knowledge toward the region's pressing need to rapidly scale mobility solutions that reduce car dependency and increase access to all.
- Policy writers and code reformers will lend their experience in advocating for regulatory reforms that successfully empower quality urbanism and avoid costly suburban sprawl.
- Advocacy champions will collaborate on legislative agenda that supports new urbanism, promotes housing abundance, and offers pathways between fire safety and walkable urbanism.
- Local and regional government officials and municipal staff will demonstrate how New Urbanism can improve economic vitality, equity, and sustainability in small-to-mid-sized communities
- Those focused on the economics of sustainable growth will play a key role in identifying the data to support quality urbanism and the financial risks of continuing a business-as-usual approach.

Key Questions that will be addressed at CNU34.Northwest Arkansas

As the new urbanist movement comes to Northwest Arkansas to leave a lasting impact on the future of the region, the content of the 2026 Congress will respond to key issues for local impact throughout the sessions, workshops, meetings, tours, Main Stages, and Keynotes of CNU34. **Session submitters are encouraged to propose content that will address the following:**

- How can municipalities move the regional conversation beyond suburban sprawl and rethink zoning and development rules to encourage more walkable, urban environments?
- What strategies can shift capital and financial investments toward urbanist projects?
- What incentives and deterrents have proven effective in influencing local development practices?
- How can a regional approach integrate infrastructure and investment for all non-vehicular transportation modes?
- How can we measure the long-term value of land through sustainable urban growth strategies?
- How can we discuss growth and quality of life in plain language, highlighting hidden costs without polarizing debates?
- What actionable alternatives exist to counter the negative impacts of sprawl on communities?
- How can polycentric regional planning preserve local identity while promoting connected urban growth?
- How can we empower residents to actively shape their communities' futures?

Submitting A Session Proposal

Living up to its name, CNU34 will take place in multiple locations across the two largest cities in the NWA region. CNU staff will be organizing the content of each day of the Congress to align with the varying context of these locations, which will factor into where sessions are placed. Communications with speakers on session placement will be clear and made well in advance. Transportation will be provided to all attendees throughout the week to ensure that sessions can be attended, regardless of where they have chosen to stay. To ensure that CNU34 is a successful Congress experience for all participants, CNU will not be able to honor personal preference for selected session location or timing within the event program. The week of CNU34 will be as follows:

- **Tuesday, May 12** will be a day of regional tours and specialized content.
- **Wednesday, May 13 to Friday, May 15** will be the bulk of our regular Congress content, including Main Stages, keynotes, and the majority of sessions.
- **Saturday, May 16** will include our Community Outreach Day content and regional tours.

Session Requirements:

Proposals for Educational Sessions, Implementation Sessions, Project Showcases and Meetings will be accepted through the abstract submission portal, [Open Water](#). Prior to starting your proposal application please review the Congress Focus, the Problem Space, and Key Learning Goals outlined above.

(Note: Have your CNU online 5-digit account number handy for your proposal application. You can find that number in your online profile by [logging in here](#). A CNU online profile doesn't require a membership. If you don't already have a CNU online account, you can [create one here](#).)

Continuing Education:

As CNU provides continuing education units (CEUs) in partnership with the American Institute of Architects, American Planning Association, and American Society for Landscape Architects, a majority of the sessions at Annual Congress require clearly written Learning Objectives. While Education Sessions, Implementation Sessions, and Meetings require four (4) Learning Objectives, a Project Showcase will require only one (1).

Rather than describing topics to be covered, learning objectives or outcomes are statements that clearly define what the participant will know or be able to do as a result of having attended the program. Each learning objectives must be observable and measurable and completes the sentence: "By the end of this session attendees will be able to...." and uses action versions. Avoid words that are vague and open to interpretation, such as know, learn, and understand. [More guidance on Learning Objectives may be found online.](#)

CNU 34 Review Process and Timeline

All submitted proposals will be reviewed by this year's Congress Program Committee, an ad hoc Board committee of subject matter experts responsible for providing oversight of the development of session types and program format, reviewing the call for proposals, reviewing and ranking all sessions, and curating and placing the sessions in the schedule. Congress Program Committee members will complete the initial review of submissions in mid-December.

You may be asked to make changes to your proposal, provide more information on your proposal, refine proposed learning objectives, or combine your proposal with another submitted proposal.

Key deadlines:

1. October 6, 2025: Request for proposals released to CNU Members
2. October 13, 2025: Request for proposals released to the public
3. November 7, 2025: Request for proposals closed
4. January 26-31, 2026: All submitters notified of proposal status
5. March 1, 2026: Deadline for selected presenters and speakers to register for Congress as confirmation of program delivery

Educational Sessions

Formerly known as “classes” or “core courses”, Educational Sessions provide the backbone of Congress learning opportunities. They are designed to teach foundational concepts to attendees and can be introductory, intermediate, or advanced level examinations of core New Urbanist principles and practice. Educational Sessions provide an opportunity for presenters to share knowledge with attendees, and require that attendees receive a document with key points and resources in addition to the PowerPoint presentation, after attending.

Proposal information required:

1. Main speaker contact information and expertise
2. Session title (10 words or less)
3. Session description (150 words or less)
4. Additional speaker contact information and expertise (if applicable) - 2 speakers total, max
5. Session level (introductory, intermediate, advanced)
6. What New Urbanist principle is being examined? (50 words or less)
7. Proposed learning objectives; four (4) minimum
8. Relevance to the Congress Focus (optional)

Implementation Sessions

To help expand the body of built examples and adopted policies that make up the practice of New

Urbanism, implementation Sessions are designed to provide attendees with a demonstration of the effective implementation of a policy, strategy, or design technique used in achieving our shared vision.

Proposal information required:

1. Main speaker contact information and expertise
2. Session title (10 words or less)
3. Session description (150 words or less)
4. What technique or policy is being examined?
5. Additional speaker contact information and expertise (if applicable) - 2 total speakers max
6. Proposed learning objectives; four (4) minimum
7. Relevance to the Congress Focus (optional)

Project Showcase

Submit a single, or themed group of (4 max), projects that aim to set an example for attendees. Project Showcase sessions can include critiques, practical analysis, lessons-learned, demonstrations of success or failures, the disconnect between the plans and reality of a project, or project outcomes. Each project will be allocated 15-minutes for a Showcase presentation, with a maximum of 4 separate projects comprising a 1-hour Showcase.

Information Required:

1. Main speaker contact information and expertise
2. Single project or group of projects?
3. Single project: Title, location (10 words or less)
4. Single projects: 1 speaker
5. Group of projects: Titles, location for all projects- Max 4 per group (10 words or less for each project)
6. Group of projects: 1 speaker per project
7. What will attendees learn about from the project(s)? (1 learning objective per project)

Meetings

Meetings are an opportunity for attendees to gather and advance New Urbanist discourse on a certain topic. The main activity in a meeting is collaborative discussion, with the outcome being a call to action. Examples include coalition building for an advocacy platform, a discussion on the agenda of a caucus or affiliate, compiling attendees' recommendations for reform.

Information Required:

1. Meeting Facilitator contact information and expertise

2. Meeting title (10 words or less)
3. Meeting's Call to Action or Objective
4. Meeting description (250 words or less)
5. Proposed learning objectives; four (4) minimum
6. Additional "meeting host" if applicable (2 total hosts, max)

Main Stage Presentations and Workshops are outside of this call for proposals. Information on this will be made available at cnu.org/cnu34/program as the program develops.