

# CNU Congress for the New Urbanism

## Request for Proposals: CNU 36

**The Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU)** is a member-based nonprofit organization championing better design of cities and towns to improve lives and strengthen communities for all. For thirty years, CNU has been the only organization reforming city-building across the country, gathering the broad spectrum of practitioners and advocates who share our mission. By highlighting impactful design principles and lowering barriers to change, CNU amplifies the grassroots power of our thousands of members to build and rebuild their cities and towns in ways that improve sustainability, accessibility, and equity for years to come.

- *We convene* a broad spectrum of multidisciplinary practitioners and advocates working on reforming city-building, driving change in communities across the US and beyond.
- *We share* best practices in urban design, policy, and implementation, opening doors for our members to enact meaningful change in their communities.
- *We amplify* the grassroots power of our members working to build/rebuild their cities and towns in ways that improve sustainability, accessibility, and equity for years to come.

### About New Urbanism

The practice of New Urbanism developed in the 1990s in reaction to the proliferation of suburban sprawl, led by a group of architects and designers who knew the built environment was capable of offering more social, economic, and environmental benefits than the prevailing real estate development patterns could provide. Built on the principles of the 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 a vision for the future in which intentional design improves the lives of all people.



## About the Annual Congress

Our annual event - called a Congress - has long been CNU's largest and most significant program, and our prime opportunity to further the practice of New Urbanism by convening to discuss, debate, and learn from one another. The Congress is unique among conferences or gatherings in the following ways:

- **Context Matters.** We move the location of our Congress every year not just so our attendees can see new things. We encourage our attendees to examine and learn from new cities and regions; to see the unique ways in which advocates and practitioners in the local host city have faced issues; and identify commonalities that can inspire change in our attendees' practice, and to look with fresh eyes onto local problem-solving opportunities.
- **Collaboration in a Problem Space.** We develop a Focus, or problem space, that highlights an issue or topic in the local context that could benefit from the brain power of hundreds of New Urbanist practitioners across disciplines. The Focus allows the Congress to bring a question, or set of issues, to the forefront of the content - providing education and collaboration that helps evolve the collective practice of New Urbanism.
- **Multidisciplinary Perspectives.** The annual Congress is one of the only professional gatherings that cuts across disciplines - our attendees include planners and urban designers, architects and landscape architects, traffic and building engineers, developers and real estate professionals, academics and researchers, and those with expertise in market or research analysis. The opportunity to rub shoulders with someone from a discipline outside your own - and markedly change the way you practice - is unique to CNU's Congress.
- **Integration of Design and Policy.** A foundational aspect of New Urbanist practice is in understanding the integration and intersection of design and policy. Good yet siloed design lacks the power to provide the environmental, economic, and social benefits that are otherwise possible. Design must be integrated with policy interventions to be able to genuinely deliver walkable, sustainable, and more equity-supportive urbanism.



### CNU's Location-Based Impact Framework

Hosting the Congress creates a concentrated moment of national attention and local collaboration that accelerates policy innovation and strengthens professional capacity, leaving communities with actionable momentum for meaningful change.



The location-based impact framework of this annual program brings Congress host communities:

#### Policy Advancement

- Increased visibility and urgency for land-use reform, housing policy, and transportation initiatives
- Direct engagement of elected officials and senior staff in peer learning and best-practice exchange

#### Implementation Momentum

- Identification of near-term demonstration projects or pilot programs
- Alignment of public and private stakeholders around shared priorities

#### Capacity-Building

- Professional development opportunities for local planning, engineering, and design audiences
- Expanded networking opportunities, connecting local practitioners to national expertise

#### Community Dialogue

- Broader public awareness of urban design and mobility issues
- Opportunities for inclusive engagement through tours, workshops, and open sessions

#### Economic & Reputational Benefit

- Short-term visitor spending and venue utilization
- Enhanced national visibility as a city committed to thoughtful growth and innovation

#### Legacy Outcomes

- Formation of post-Congress task forces and implementation committees
- Integration of Congress insights and direct technical assistance support into comprehensive plans, zoning updates, or capital improvement programs

### Bringing the Congress Home

Each Congress has the following key elements, the delivery of which is a partnership between the Local Host Committee and CNU staff.

#### Tours

Local and regional tours (on foot, bike, or by bus) are one of the premier opportunities for Congress host cities to showcase what makes the buildings, blocks, and neighborhoods unique as well as as ensure attendees are embedded in understanding the issues and lessons to be learned. In partnership with CNU staff, the LHC refines and delivers around two dozen tours as part of the Congress.

#### Program

The Congress Program is packed with sessions focused on education and implementation, learning from project showcases, hearing from headlining speakers, and connecting for roundtable discussions. The Congress Program delivers nearly 100 hours of continuing education.

#### Legacy Program

Ensuring that each Congress has an impact beyond just its week, CNU invites municipalities and neighborhood organizations within the Congress's host region to apply for pro-bono technical assistance from leading urban design firms. Through public engagement and collaboration, CNU's Legacy Projects demonstrate the power of great urban design, with communities experiencing short-term progress and long-lasting momentum.

#### Workshops

CNU's most powerful tool is the intersection between policy and design. At each Congress, we organize on-site, problem solving opportunities for our multidisciplinary attendees to address issues key to the region.



### Economic Impact

Unlike traditional conferences, cities that host the annual Congress benefit from the desire of our attendees to get out of the classroom and into the community.

The average annual Congress does the following for its local host community:

- Brings over **1400** attendees from around the country and across the world.
- Engages hundreds of local / regional attendees in specialized content.
- Produces **\$1.7M** in direct event spending, with **\$2.9M** total across the city.

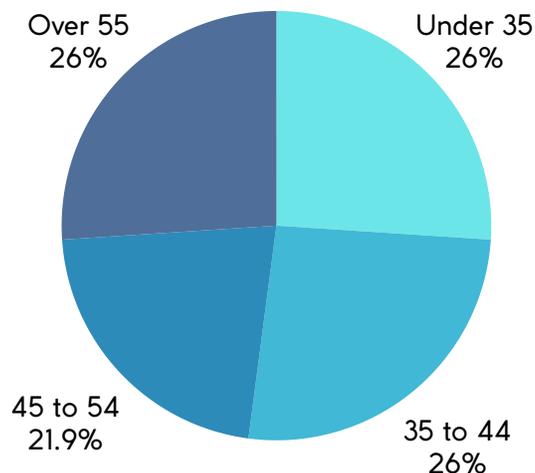


### Congress Attendees

#### Who comes to a Congress?

- Planners
- Architects
- Urban Planners
- Students
- Planning Directors
- Developers
- Nonprofit Professionals
- Engineers
- Elected Officials
- Urban Designers
- Landscape Architects
- Citizen Activists
- Attorneys

#### Attendees are diverse in age and growing younger:



#### Attendees are increasingly more diverse each year:

- 56% male
- 33% non-white
- Increasing diversity in professional background, race, and gender

## Responding to the RFP

To express your interest in hosting CNU 36, submit the following to [congress@cnu.org](mailto:congress@cnu.org), in PDF form by May 30, 2026.

### 1. City, Region, or Location

### 2. Point of Contact for the RFP

3. **Proposed Congress Dates:** Four days on a Tuesday to Friday schedule, at some point between May 1 – June 30, in order of preference, avoiding major holidays or other local events.

4. **The Pitch** – 3-4 paragraphs that cover the following:

- a. Why your city, region, or location?
- b. Why now? What is happening that requires the attention of CNU attendees, or that they can learn from you? What opportunity for impact could this Congress make?
- c. What do you love about your city, region, or location that you want to make sure everyone sees?
- d. Where do you see your city, region, or location reflected in the Charter of the New Urbanism? What section or sections of the Charter feel particularly important to your context?
- e. What in your city, region, or location needs work? What has it accomplished?
- f. What do you stand to gain from having the Congress in your city, region, or location?
- g. What are your major goals?

### 5. Proposed Tours

- a. 10-15 tours you would take us on to show us the uniqueness and complexity of your city, region, or location. Title and short description only (with photos, optional).

### 6. Committee Partners

- a. Who is on your Local Host Committee team and what role will they play? Please include their relationship to the city, region, or location and what skills they bring to the committee. A description of the committee roles can be found in *Appendix I*.

### 7. Fundraising

- a. A demonstrated capacity to raise \$300k from local and regional sponsors including individual, corporate, and philanthropic sources.
- b. A minimum of \$150k in likely prospects that includes name, amount, and whether you have contacted them.
- c. A list of any CNU mission-aligned foundations or corporate prospects that the LHC intends to steward in partnership with CNU.

### 8. Venues

- a. Any ideal venues for elements of the Congress that you would like us to know about.
- b. A hotel or hotels that can accommodate the roomblock and meeting space requirements described in more detail in *Appendix II*.

## Appendix I: Building a Local Host Committee

The partnership between CNU's staff, board, and the Local Host Committee (LHC) is one of the foundational elements to a Congress' success. The LHC serves the following key roles:

1. **Partner:** We rely on the LHC to help us deliver the Congress in fundamental ways. A cooperative, competent LHC is vital to the success of the event from inception to delivery. By taking on the role of LHC, you are signing up to help deliver a major programmatic event across a number of key areas, as described below. Specific focus on cooperative delivery of tours, Legacy Projects, fundraising, and onsite coordination.
2. **Ambassador:** We rely on the LHC to help communicate the unique opportunity that is hosting a Congress to local partners, Legacy Project participants, volunteers, and media.
3. **Local Knowledge Provider:** We rely on the LHC to inform our decision-making around programmatic elements, tours, speakers, venues, events, and engagement.

LHC time commitment and involvement will vary throughout the cycle of developing and delivering the Congress. For the chairs for committee leaders, this averages 10 - 25 hours a month, with the members of each committee having varying responsibilities and time commitments, which CNU recognizes as an in-kind donation of time and talents. The recommended committee structure is as follows:

### **Chair, Co-Chairs, or Executive Committee:**

CNU needs a main point of contact with whom to work directly throughout the process of development and delivery of the Congress. This can be a single person, a co-chair arrangement, or a small group (less than 5) who together serve as the 'executive' committee for the entire LHC. This depends largely on the working relationships locally and how many people want to be regularly interfacing with CNU. However, we have found that a single or pair of chairs need to be identified from the earliest stages of planning, for efficient decision making throughout the process.

**Tours:** One of the main avenues for the LHC to influence what attendees to the Congress do and see is through the tours program. We recommended that between 20-30 tours are developed that allow attendees to experience the city or region on foot, bike, and by bus. The Tours Committee (or Tours Chair) is responsible for identifying potential tour subjects / leaders and working with CNU staff to refine the concepts and execute the tours. The work of the tours committee is front-loaded in Congress planning and delivery.

**Legacy Projects:** This is the LHC's opportunity to bring the know-how of CNU's membership and the principles of New Urbanism to actual projects in the host city or region. It is also a significant programmatic effort for CNU and in many ways operates on a cycle separate from, but in partnership with, the Congress. Legacy Project work starts in July of the year prior to the Congress at the very latest, with a heavy lift occurring during the week of the charrettes, which can range from the fall of that same year to January-February of the following year. It is recommended that the LHC has a small committee (or a Chair with a group of volunteers) to coordinate the Legacy Projects that will not have other Congress responsibilities to ensure they are able to be focused on leveraging this program.

**Venues:** CNU needs local intel on venues - from the hotel, meeting space, plenary space, as well as additional smaller venues for VIP receptions, development events, and socials. The LHC will provide recommendations, and CNU will make decisions based on budget in partnership with the LHC. There does not usually need to be a person or committee assigned entirely to venues.

**Communications and Marketing:** CNU needs partnership in developing communications and marketing strategies for the Congress that go beyond registration outreach. The LHC will work with CNU staff to identify local stories that need to be told, to connect CNU staff with local media outlets, and to determine the lasting impact we want the Congress to have. There does not usually need to be a person or committee assigned entirely to communications, if there is a strong understanding of the local communications context represented on the committee or amongst the chairs.

**Volunteers:** CNU requires onsite volunteers for the Legacy Project charrette dates as well as during the Congress. In return for 10 hours of volunteer time, CNU provides a very discounted registration. Volunteers are identified through a general application online, to which the LHC can direct groups of people they have identified as being reliable volunteers - such as local city staff, university students, etc. A LHC Volunteer Coordinator is generally recommended - who can serve on the broader LHC but not be a Chair.

## Appendix II: Physical Requirements

### Expected Attendance:

1,500 people

### Room Block:

Each Congress requires one to two main hotels that can accommodate the following number of room nights.

- Monday: 30 rooms nights
- Tuesday: 75 rooms nights
- Wednesday: 375 room nights
- Thursday: 375 rooms nights
- Friday: 325 rooms nights
- Saturday: 50 rooms nights
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Exact room numbers to be adjusted based on hotel, space, and Congress planning. Previous venues and room pick-ups can be provided upon request.

### Meeting Space:

CNU requires plenary / general session space for 1100 as well as 6-8 concurrent breakout rooms holding over 100 in theater seating. A combination of private event space (theaters, auditoriums, concert venues, etc.) and hotel meeting space (ballrooms). Additionally, other creative solutions to hosting our audience will be entertained.

### General Session:

Plenary / general session timing can be flexible depending on options but typically CNU starts each day in general session from 8:30 to 10:00am.

### Breakouts:

Must be available 24/7, capacity is approximate:

6 rooms for 150 set in Theatre; 2-3 rooms set for 100 in rounds.

### Show Management Space:

- Board Meeting: 1 boardroom for 20 people conference style
- Staff Office: Monday through Sunday. Perimeter tables w/ chairs or existing conference set, lockable.
- Speaker Ready Room: Tuesday - Saturday, conference set or a couple rounds
- Registration: Foyer space with room for 4 registration counter/cocktail tables for self-check in stations; CNU information table; volunteer check in table; local CVB information table.

### **Exhibits:**

Exhibit space for 10-15 six-foot tabletops. We would like these in a foyer space instead of closed off in a room:

- Exhibitors move-in: Tuesday evening or Wednesday morning
- Show Hours: Thursday & Friday all day, Saturday morning
- Exhibitors move-out: Saturday

This area will require space for the following:

- Food & Beverage stations: Bars (4 or 5), break stations, and scattered cocktail rounds.
- Bookstore: 8-10 tables in a U-Shape

### **Food & Beverage:**

CNU's F&B minimum should be between \$60,000 - \$100,000 all inclusive for the conference week. This will include:

- Continental breakfast w/ protein enhancement: Wednesday and Thursday
- Hot Breakfast Buffet: Friday
- Various Coffee Breaks for four days (Wed, Thur, Fri)
- Possible Lunches for purchase on Thursday, Friday & Saturday (if restaurants/concession stands are not readily available)