



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.

In this guide, you will find:

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About CNU 35 Twin Cities

CNU is coming to the Twin Cities, a region that has long been at the center of critical national conversations about public space, equity, safety, and belonging. Few metropolitan areas have grappled more publicly or more honestly with the tensions and opportunities that define urbanism today, from the legacy of highway construction through historic neighborhoods to bold investments in transit, affordable housing, and park infrastructure. The Twin Cities bring both the challenges and the aspirations that CNU members work to address every day, making this an especially meaningful and timely gathering.

CNU 35 will be anchored in the Mill District of Minneapolis, a walkable, connected neighborhood that reflects the city's industrial history and its ongoing commitment to adaptive reuse, riverfront access, infill housing, and multimodal transportation. Through walking tours, local project showcases, and conversations with practitioners and residents shaping the region's future, attendees will experience firsthand how the civic realm can serve as a foundation for community connection and bring that energy back to their own communities.

Our host hotel, the Renaissance Depot Minneapolis, is the former Milwaukee Road train depot, which operated from 1899 to 1971. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, it features exposed iron trusses, barrel-vault ceilings, arched windows, brick walls, and a clock tower modeled after the Giralda in Seville, Spain. CNU 35 attendees will be thrilled to host the entirety of the educational program within this adaptive reuse project.

CNU 35 Focus

The Building Blocks of Community: Strengthening Social Bonds through the Public Realm

The strength of a community lies beyond its buildings, streets, and infrastructure. It comes from a connection between residents, business owners, and community institutions; a connection between real people that fosters belonging, builds trust, and enables communities to respond to challenges and shape their collective futures.

While a strong social infrastructure can be built anywhere, new urbanists know that the built environment has a huge impact on community connection. In fact, the places where these connections naturally take root are essential to community life. **Streets, sidewalks, parks, squares, civic spaces - the spaces between buildings - form the public realm and are the physical foundation of our social infrastructure.** When thoughtfully designed and accessible to all, these shared spaces encourage community interaction, strengthen social bonds, and create opportunities for civic life.

At CNU 35, we will explore the public realm as a foundational building block of strong, connected, and resilient communities.

The Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul provide a compelling setting for this conversation. The experiences of these communities have brought national attention to questions of justice, democracy, and belonging, underscoring the importance of public spaces in shaping community identity, fostering civic participation, and building trust. With this Focus at CNU 35, we build on the knowledge gained at CNU 34 when we heard from expert designers and researchers who explicitly spoke of the impact that social infrastructure has on climate resilience, mental health and wellbeing, and economic opportunity.

The Charter of the New Urbanism states that *a primary task of all urban architecture and landscape design is the physical definition of streets and public spaces as places of shared use*. Public space is not a byproduct of good urban design, it is the intended outcome.

CNU 35 challenges us to consider not only how we design and build communities, but how the places we create strengthen the relationships that sustain them.

The CNU 35 Focus in the Program

Creating a strong public realm requires more than good design. It demands collaboration among the disciplines that shape our communities, including urban planning, architecture, landscape architecture, transportation engineering, real estate development, public policy, community development, and civic leadership.

For decades, conventional development practices, disconnected land-use policies, and automobile-oriented infrastructure have fragmented communities and diminished the quality of public spaces. Addressing these challenges requires us to move beyond professional silos, reconsider established practices, and place the shared public realm at the center of community planning and investment. The urgency could not be stronger in our local host region, and at this particular moment in history.

CNU invites practitioners, researchers, policymakers, community leaders, advocates, and allied professionals to propose sessions that examine how the planning, design, development, and stewardship of the built environment can strengthen social connections and foster more inclusive, vibrant, and resilient communities.

We are particularly interested in proposals that explore questions such as:

- **Designing for Social Connection:** How can the physical form of streets, neighborhoods, civic spaces, and building frontages encourage social interaction, strengthen community identity, and foster a sense of belonging?
- **Reclaiming the Public Realm:** How can communities transform automobile-oriented streets, disconnected neighborhoods, and underutilized spaces into welcoming places that prioritize people and shared civic life?

- **Connecting Design and Community Resilience:** What role does the public realm play in strengthening social networks, supporting local problem-solving, and helping communities respond to economic, environmental, and social challenges?
- **Rethinking Transportation Planning, Engineering, and Street Design:** What changes to street design standards, transportation policies, and infrastructure investment priorities are needed to balance mobility and access with walkability, human-scaled design, and vibrant community life?
- **Advancing Inclusive Public Spaces:** How can planning, design, and public investment create places that are accessible, welcoming, and meaningful to people of different ages, abilities, backgrounds, and incomes?
- **Breaking Down Professional Silos:** How can planners, designers, engineers, developers, public officials, and community organizations collaborate to create a coherent public realm rather than a collection of disconnected projects?
- **Aligning Policy, Investment, and Design:** What changes to zoning, transportation standards, development regulations, financing, and public investment are needed to make connected, human-scaled communities easier to build and sustain?
- **Learning from Implementation:** What can successful projects, emerging practices, and lessons from unsuccessful efforts teach us about creating and maintaining public spaces that support vibrant community life?
- **Working within Market Restrictions:** How can we strive to build beautiful, well-functioning spaces while dealing with the very real demands of capital financing and market response?

What We're Looking For

CNU 35 seeks engaging, substantive, and forward-looking sessions that advance the principles of New Urbanism while offering practical insights for the people working to transform communities.

We encourage proposals that:

- Bring together multiple disciplines and perspectives to address complex challenges in the built environment;
- Present innovative ideas, successful practices, and lessons learned from real-world projects;
- Explore the relationship between physical design, public policy, economic development, and social outcomes;
- Challenge conventional approaches to planning, transportation, development, and community investment;
- Offer actionable strategies, tools, and approaches that participants can apply in their own communities; and
- Encourage meaningful dialogue, critical inquiry, and active participation rather than relying exclusively on traditional presentations.

We welcome proposals addressing the Congress Focus as well as other important and emerging topics in New Urbanism, including those that examine regional planning, neighborhood design, housing, transportation reform, climate resilience, equitable development, and implementation.

Submitting A Session Proposal

Proposals for Educational Sessions, Implementation Sessions, Project Showcases and Meetings will be accepted through the abstract submission portal, [Open Water](#).

(Note: Have your CNU 5-digit account number handy for your proposal application. You can find that number in your online profile of the CNU Constituent Portal 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:

To demonstrate the educational value of sessions at our annual Congress, CNU staff seeks to qualify as many sessions as possible for continuing education units (CEUs) in partnership with the American Institute of Architects, American Planning Association, and American Society for Landscape Architects. To accomplish this, we require that submitters select the intended educational level of the proposed session, as well as identify Learning Objectives (LOs) for their material. Education Sessions and Implementation Sessions require intended educational level and LOs to be submitted along with their proposal. Meetings and Project Showcases do not require education levels or (LOs) as part of the proposal process.

Education levels for Education Sessions and Implementation Sessions are defined as follows:

- **Introductory** - Material covered is foundational in nature and sessions are designed for attendees who have no prior background or are just starting in the domain of practice presented in the session.
- **Intermediate** - Material is designed for participants who have a working knowledge of the topic and a few years of experience in the domain of practice.
- **Advanced** - Material is designed for participants who have a detailed knowledge of the topic and specific experience applying or using this knowledge in a professional capacity over a long period of time.

Creating quality LOs requires thinking beyond topics to be covered in the session, but rather to written statements that clearly define what attendees will know or be able to do as a result of having attended the session. Each LO must be observable and measurable and complete the sentence: "By the end of this session attendees will be able to..."

Use verbs like:

- Define, Recognize, Describe, Discuss, Explain, Identify, and Summarize for **Introductory courses**;
- Apply, Demonstrate, Produce, Analyze, Determine, Critique, Examine, and Summarize for **Intermediate courses**; and
- Assess, Compare, Debate, Generate, Synthesize, Communicate, Propose, and Recommend for **Advanced courses**.

Avoid words that are vague and open to interpretation, such as *know*, *learn*, and *understand*.

An example of LOs from an Introductory CNU 34 session include:

1. *Explain* large scale adaptive re-use redevelopment context without a single "master developer"
2. *Describe* how projects came together: the importance of the mixed-use development and design vision in conjunction with code hacks and changes to zoning and review processes and adjacent public infrastructure investment
3. *Discuss* the hurdles (and lessons learned) to developing compatible infill housing and maintaining affordability in an increasingly expensive market
4. *Explain* why pocket neighborhoods demonstrate thoughtful density, craftsmanship, and livability in a community's evolving urban fabric

CNU 35 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 and ensuring that this year's program is reflective of the breadth and depth of the New Urbanist movement.

Key deadlines:

1. October 29: Call for Session Proposals released to CNU Members
2. November 1: Call for Session Proposals released to the public
3. November 26: Call for Session Proposals window closes
4. December 7 - January 15: Congress Program Committee works on final program
5. February 5: All submitters notified of proposal status
6. February 22: Early Bird Registration opens
7. March 1: Deadline for selected presenters and speakers to register for Congress as confirmation of program delivery
8. April 16: Last day for speakers to register with a discount
9. April 30: End of Early Bird pricing

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.

Session Types

Educational Sessions

Educational Sessions provide the backbone of Congress learning opportunities. They are designed to be a deep dive by subject matter experts into core new urbanist topics, issues around the Congress Focus, or current issues in the practice. Educational Sessions can range from entry-level introductions to aspects of new urbanist practice and innovation, to advanced learning around technical subjects, practice, or design. They provide an opportunity for expert presenters to share knowledge directly with attendees. Attendees should be regularly engaged in conversation or activities throughout each session to advance their comprehension of the subject matter.

Each educational session should have a facilitator who ensures the presentation is cohesive and delivers on the learning objectives, especially if there are multiple presenters. Each session will be between 60-75 mins, depending on subject matter and number of speakers. The duration and placement of the session will be by CNU staff in partnership with the Congress Program Committee.

Information required to submit a CNU 35 Educational Session proposal:

1. Main speaker contact information
2. Session title (10 words or less)
3. Session description (150 words or less)
4. Additional speaker contact information (if applicable) - 4 total speakers max
5. Session level (Introductory, Intermediate, Advanced)
6. Proposed learning objectives; four (4) minimum
7. 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. They provide an opportunity for practitioners of various levels of experience to share knowledge and direct experience of implementation with attendees.

Each implementation session should have a facilitator who ensures the presentation is cohesive and delivers on the learning objectives, especially if there are multiple presenters. Each session will be between 60-75 mins, depending on subject matter and number of speakers. The duration and placement of the session will be by CNU staff in partnership with the Congress Program Committee.

Information required to submit a CNU 35 Implementation Session proposal:

1. Main speaker contact information
2. Session title (10 words or less)
3. Session description (150 words or less)
4. What implementation of a policy, strategy, or design technique are you proposing to demonstrate?
5. Additional speaker contact information (if applicable) – 4 total speakers max
6. Education level (Introductory, Intermediate, Advanced)
7. Proposed learning objectives; four (4) minimum
8. Relevance to the Congress Focus (optional)

Project Showcase:

This session type is your opportunity to show a single project or suite of projects that demonstrate an aspect(s) of or innovation in the new urbanist practice. 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. This session type is designed to be a quick look at something attendees can learn from – with the expectation that each project fits in a 15-minute window (inclusive of questions).

Single project submissions will be combined by the Congress Program Committee into cohesive sessions that are topical, thematic, or otherwise make sense together. In the instance of combined projects, CNU may assign a facilitator to ensure the session remains cohesive for the attendees within a 75 or 60 minute session. The duration and placement of the session will be by CNU staff in partnership with the Congress Program Committee.

Information required to submit a CNU 35 Project Showcase proposal:

1. Main speaker contact information
2. Single project or group of projects?
3. Single project: Title, location
4. Single project: showcase image (5 MB max)
5. Single projects: 1 speaker
6. Group of projects: describe what the group of themed projects showcases, collectively
7. Group of projects: Titles, location for all projects- Max 4 projects per group
8. Group of projects: 1 image per project (5MB max)
9. Group of projects: 1 speaker per project

Meetings:

Rather than panel presentations, Meetings are focused discussions, critiques, and deep dives into specific areas of new urbanist practice. Meetings should be related to the Congress Focus and solicit meaningful engagement from the participants rather than having them view a presentation. Meetings should have an outcome (i.e. gather interest in drafting a document) and do not provide CEUs.

Example of a previous successful meeting and its outcome: At CNU 33, a group of transportation planners got together to discuss the landscape of their work given the political climate of 2025. As a facilitated conversation, attendees shared individual experiences, goals, ideas, and concerns – ultimately resulting in the group building an agenda for what New Urbanists in transportation fields wanted to accomplish. This meeting resulted in a formal Transportation Resource Forum, a group that continues to meet and is planning a formal gathering in conjunction with CNU 35.

Meeting Facilitator and Scribe: Each meeting should have a facilitator to lead the discussion towards the intended outcome and a scribe to capture the outcome.

Proposal information required:

1. Meeting Facilitator contact information and expertise
2. Meeting title (10 words or less)
3. Meeting's Call to Action or Goal
4. Additional facilitators and scribes (if applicable)
5. Meeting description (150 words or less)

Terms and Conditions

By submitting a proposal for review by the Congress Program Committee, applicants acknowledges the following:

Session Format: CNU reserves the right to ask you to change your session type format (i.e. Education Session, Project Showcase, etc.).

Session Content: CNU and the Congress Program Committee may ask session organizers to adjust content or add speakers, to combine with another session, or to broaden (or narrow) the scope of their session to accommodate the program.

Session Description and Learning Objectives: Applicants may be asked to clarify or update the session description and/or the learning objectives in order to meet continuing education eligibility requirements

Session Practice Areas/Topics: The Congress Program Committee may request applicants to confirm an alternate primary practice area or secondary topic to better align with the overall Congress program structure

Session Placement: CNU staff cannot guarantee accommodation of requests for timing placement. While every effort will be made to place sessions and notify speakers before the launch of Early Bird Registration, CNU 35 speakers should plan to be in Minneapolis for the entirety of the Congress.

