

AFTACON 2025

Call for Breakout Session Proposals

Conference Overview

Americans for the Arts (AFTA) sees 2025 AFTACON as an opportunity to CONvene and CONnect, and more deeply, a chance to CONsider the notion of how we do our work being just as important as what we do and why. Learn more about our commitment to belonging [HERE](#).

2025 AFTACON is built with and for the arts and culture field through our co-creative process. This includes engaging our [Member Committee](#) in determining the criteria specified below for program session submissions and selecting the final slate of breakout sessions. The criteria have been designed with the goal of offering programming that speaks to the needs of the local arts ecosystem and uplifts the thought-leadership of those who support universal access to arts and culture.

As a national organization, we have a broad scope of work and serve a constellation of local arts agencies and organizations, each unique in how it serves its local community. The Member Committee is attuned to the personal perspective that each of us bring to our work and has sought to provide a way to both create clear “pathways” that give attendees the opportunity to deep dive into one of five focus areas and to uplift the intersection between topic and perspective. You will see that while we ask applicants to select one focus area for their proposal, applicants are also encouraged to select additional markers that describe their perspective and approach.

**Note to prospective applicants – we look forward to receiving your strongest proposal in the appropriate focus area for your work. You do not need to cover all the areas in your proposal. We are interested in specificity.*

Submission Considerations

AFTACON 2025 will take place from Thursday, June 11 – Saturday, June 14, 2025, in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Breakout Session proposals are due by Monday, January 6th at 11:59 PM Eastern Time.

The Member Committee will review breakout session proposals in January and February and will make selections by the middle of March. All applicants will be notified of their selection status by Tuesday, March 31 at 5 PM Eastern Time.

How to Propose a Session

1. Review the AFTACON 2025 Session Guidelines to learn about the session pathways, session format options, and other important guidance for a successful session proposal submission.
2. Click on [THIS LINK](#) to submit your proposal form NO LATER THAN Monday, January 6th at 11:59 PM Eastern Time. For assistance completing the form, please contact the convention team at convention@artsusa.org.
3. After the member committee has selected the sessions, we will contact session applicants individually to ask for more details. The AFTACON team and the local partner ArtsWave will work with session applicants, as appropriate, to identify any local resources needed.

Session Guidelines

All sessions will be 65 minutes in length and should be professional development oriented. The goal of these sessions is to share solutions, case-studies, and tools for addressing the challenges and opportunities that face the local arts ecosystem. Do you have wisdom that might benefit other colleagues working in the arts and culture sector? This is the place to share it!

Sessions are intended to be dynamic and interactive in nature and will be presented at the conference hotel, Hyatt Regency Cincinnati. Sessions can be presented in a variety of formats (see options below). We encourage session applicants to think outside of the box – or typical panel – when proposing sessions. Depending on the format, sessions can include a maximum of six speakers including a moderator.

The Pathways (tracks)

As part of AFTA's Strategic Realignment Process, we have identified four pillars of our work: the **Cultural, Economic, Educational,** and **Social** powers of the arts. For AFTACON 2025, we will be using those pillars as pathways, also known as tracks, to view the work being done across your local arts ecosystem. We are also adding a fifth pathway- the **Future** of the arts.

We are looking for breakout sessions that use those five pathways (Cultural, Economic, Educational, Social, Future) to examine a subject. **We recognize that there is a great deal of intersectionality between these five pathways but ask you to pick one (1) primary pathway for your proposal.** You will also be able to select up to four (4) "lenses" that help describe you or your work. These lenses will be included in the program description to help attendees select which sessions to attend.

We will be selecting four (4) sessions for each pathway.

These pathways carry a multitude of definitions, but for the purposes of this convention we are defining them as:

Cultural Power of the Arts

The cultural power of the arts is an acknowledgement that arts and culture embody, reflect and communicate intersectional lives, including beliefs, values, spirituality, identities, and traditions that are passed down from generation to generation, and that continue to evolve in individuals and communities. Cultural expression and preservation can increase cross-cultural interaction and understanding. Maintaining and sharing local culture, arts, crafts and traditions reinforces cultural identity and strengthens cultural values, sense of belonging and sense of place. When creatives have opportunities to connect and exchange ideas with other creatives and culture workers and engage with organizations as decision makers to shape community actions and initiatives, they are an essential part of creating thriving places.

The Cultural Power of the Arts may be the appropriate pathway for topics like arts & community engagement, supporting individual artists, creative placekeeping, COVID shifts, mentorship, tourism and artists, or creative and culture bearers as leaders/decision makers.

Economic Power of the Arts

The arts are a proven economic accelerator that increases both arts and non-arts jobs alike. In 2022, nonprofit arts and culture organizations and their audiences generated \$151.7 billion in economic activity—\$73.3 billion in spending by the organizations, which leveraged an additional \$78.4 billion in event-related spending by their audiences. The impact of this economic activity is far reaching, supporting 2.6 million jobs, generating \$29.1 billion in tax revenue, and providing \$101 billion in personal income to residents. AEP6 sends a strong signal that when we support the arts, we are investing in both economic and community well-being. The arts fuel inclusive economic development and vitality at the national, state and local levels and increase a community's competitiveness to attract tourists and an innovative creative economy workforce. The arts help the entirety of the economy by creating a welcoming environment that in turn boots quality of life. For artists, when work pays enough to secure housing, food, entertainment, and healthcare, artists do better and can participate in local events and performances.

The Economic Power of the Arts may be the appropriate pathway for topics like arts funding & grantmaking, arts & economic impact, thriving local creative economies, small/micro business development, or guaranteed basic income and economic empowerment for artists, creatives and culture bearers.

Educational Power of the Arts

The arts have a tremendous power as a learning tool for youth and adults alike. Learning in and through arts and culture utilizes imagination, creativity, and artistic exploration that imparts life-long knowledge, habits of mind, and technical skills for individuals to thrive in the real world. The arts are not just a luxury but a core necessity, systematically intertwined with personal and societal growth. They are critical to empowering individuals to realize their full capabilities by fostering self-efficacy, collaboration, and cognitive development. Arts education brings cultural awareness to the forefront, allowing learners to engage deeply with diverse perspectives and to think with intellect and empathy, applying skills across job roles and industries. Furthermore, the arts play a key role in equity and decolonization work, building a shared sense of humanity while contributing to the development of a highly skilled workforce. The arts are essential, not optional, in preparing life-long learners and creative problem solvers who can meet the demands of an increasingly complex world.

The Educational Power of the Arts may be the appropriate pathway for topics like arts education, youth development, lifelong learning, art administrator professional development, community education, messaging, or conference/summit learning.

Social Power of the Arts

Arts and Culture and artists contribute to building an inclusive society based on fundamental values of equity, social justice, human rights and freedoms. Among the ways that arts and culture contribute to positive community change include promoting civic engagement, social inclusion, impacting public health and wellbeing, contributing to community visioning and planning, and neighborhood revitalization. When creatives have opportunities to live and work in places where people from other sectors gather, the community benefits from the possibility of residents collaborating on creative approaches to equitable community-building and problem-solving.

The Social Power of the Arts may be the appropriate pathway for topics like arts & health, accessibility in the arts, cross-sector collaboration, or arts advocacy.

Future of the Arts

AFTA envisions a future that sees the arts and culture as essential in contributing to the wellbeing of all residents. Through local policies, programs and practices, arts and culture ensure dignity and fairness in an ever evolving world. Communities that value creativity advocate for the inclusion of arts and culture roles in shaping vibrant, equitable, and thriving environments through the intersection of tradition and innovation. We know that arts and culture have a role in addressing global and local challenges. We encourage innovative thinking and concepts developed through professional expertise, both conceptual and realized. How do we imagine creating the world we want to thrive in?

The Future of the Arts may be the appropriate pathway for topics like arts & technology, arts & AI, arts & sustainability, innovations in arts administration or exploring key questions shaping the future of the arts.

Lenses

Lenses are a way for applicants to highlight additional aspects, and communities associated with their presentation beyond the main pathway. Applicants are allowed to select up to four (4) lenses for their proposal (or none at all). Feel free to select the markers that reflect your personal perspective or your position in the world. Use or type of lens will not impact whether your proposal is selected.

Selected proposals will have these markers displayed in the Convention program alongside the session description. They will help attendees select which sessions they want to attend by establishing a graphic shorthand for intersectional perspectives.

- **Artist Led:** Describes a session led by someone who identifies as an artist or creative.
- **LAA Led:** Describes a session led by someone who works at a local arts agency.
- **Educator Led:** Describes a session led by someone who is an educator.
- **Advocacy Focus:** Describes a session with an advocacy focus.
- **Administrative Focus:** Describes a session with a focus on innovations in arts administration.
- **Accessibility Focus:** Describes a session focusing on accessibility in the arts.
- **BIPOC and/ or ALAANA Focus:** Describes a session with a focus on serving the global majority (Black, Indigenous, People of Color and African, Latine, Asian, Arab, Native American).
- **LGBTQ+ Focus:** Describes a session with a focus on Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans, Queer, and expansive experiences of gender and sexual identities.
- **Rural Focus*:** Describes a session focused on rural communities.
- **Suburban Focus*:** Describes a session focused on suburban communities.
- **Urban Focus*:** Describes a session focused on urban communities.
- **Cross-Sector:** Describes a session that focuses on the intersection between arts and another industry.
- **Government:** Describes a session that focuses on arts work within a government or municipality.
- **Development:** Describes a session that focuses on arts funding.

* Urban, suburban, and rural areas can be differentiated by a number of factors, including population density, location, and development.

Session Format Options

Each session block for the 2025 AFTA Convention will be 75 minutes in length. We recommend that the content of each session proposal lasts 65 minutes to provide time for changeover.

Session proposals for any of the following formats are welcomed.

Panel Dialogue

A standard panel presentation – presented with 2-4 speakers, each bringing a variety of experiences/perspectives to the topic – that may feature a deep-dive/field-wide conversation, dialogue with peers with different concentrations, geographies, methodologies, etc., or a case study inquiry.

Number of Presenters: 3-4 (Including a moderator)

Type of Seating: Theater Style Seating

Max Capacity: 90 – 250+

Fishbowl Dialogue

In this dynamic session style, there are 3-4 speakers who contribute to an engaging dialogue concerned with field-wide issues. Rather than using a panel presentation format, speakers gather in a discussion circle with participants seated in concentric circles around them. This session style allows for deeper conversation amongst speakers while encouraging those in the outside circles to participate in this witnessed conversation by joining the fishbowl.

Number of Presenters: 3-4

Type of Seating: Classroom Seating

Max Capacity: 45

Expert Lecture

A formal presentation by a single expert presenter who will share a case study, personal narrative, or other type of lecture followed by a response to audience questions.

Number of Presenters: 1

Type of Seating: Theater Style Seating

Max Capacity: 90 - 250+

Lightning Roundtables

For subjects that are well suited for a format other than a panel, lightning roundtables offer an opportunity for peer learning on a variety of subjects in quick succession. Each table has a host who puts forward a discussion topic within the theme, after 15-20 minutes, the host remains, and all others move to another table. Dialogue continues for

three rounds followed by a final share out by hosts. Dialogues are facilitated by practitioners, organized by focus area, and encourage peer exchange to share common experiences, challenges, approaches, and solutions.

Number of Presenters: 6

Type of Seating: Roundtable Seating

Max Capacity: 50

PechaKucha (PE CHA KU CHA)

This is for groups interested in sharing new ideas or works in progress. Pecha Kucha, chit-chat in Japanese, is a unique presentation style. These presentations are known for telling stories through images rather than text and are typically brief. They use the 20x20 rule, where each presentation consists of 20 slides, and each slide is displayed for only 20 seconds, automatically progressing to the next one. This results in a total presentation time per presenter of 6 minutes and 40 seconds. A PechaKucha proposal should have 6 presenters attached to the session and will feature a Q&A at the end of the session.

Number of Presenters: 6

Type of Seating: Theater Style Seating

Max Capacity: 90 – 250+

Birds of a Feather Discussions

Birds of a Feather sessions are relatively small and informal gatherings designed to build networks and explore ideas. Rather than give a formal presentation, facilitators will prepare questions or ideas around a particular topic for you to discuss.

Number of Presenters: 1-2

Type of Seating: Roundtable Seating

Max Capacity: 50 - 110

Interactive Workshop

An interactive workshop – presented by a team of 2-4 facilitators – is designed to engage participants in learning new frameworks, practical approaches and tools, case studies to inform work in your home community, and skills for advancing our collective field-wide work. These workshops can take varied formats including creative inquiry; generative, arts-based practice; break-out discussion; hands-on mapping/analysis; or skill-building; among others. The session should include participatory components and space for interacting with the facilitators in addition to Q&A.

Number of Presenters: 2-4

Type of Seating: Classroom Style Seating

Max Capacity: 45 - 90

Think Tank

Think Tanks focus on a single issue or question. Initially, a chairperson orients attendees to the issue or question and relevant context. Then, attendees break into small groups to explore the issue or question and finally reconvene to share their enhanced understanding through a discussion facilitated by the chairperson.

Number of Presenters: 1-2

Type of Seating: Roundtable Seating

Max Capacity: 50 - 110

Campfire

Campfire Sessions begin a lot like a traditional presentation, with a speaker (or multiple speakers) at the front of the room presenting an idea to a group of people. After 15 or 20 minutes the focus shifts from the presenter to the audience. For the remainder of the session, the presenter becomes a facilitator, inviting comments, insights, and questions from those around the room. Campfire sessions allow attendees to drive their own learning and share experiences with others, which also assists with networking.

Number of Presenters: 1-3

Type of Seating: Theater Style Seating

Max Capacity: 90 - 250+

Audio/Visual Requirements

Please indicate in your proposal if you have any A/V needs for your session beyond a projector and screen. Session applicants and/or presenters are responsible for providing their own laptops for presentations or any other computer-based displays. Presenters with Mac computers must also bring the appropriate computer-to-projector A/V adapter.

Evaluation Criteria & Priorities

The Member Committee will be evaluating submissions on the following criteria: Interest, Clarity, Expertise, Creativity, and Urgency/Resonance. For an in-depth explanation of each criterion, please review the rubric found at

<https://afta2025convention.org/>

Additionally, AFTA requires that each breakout session:

- Must be applicable to the local level and/or have local impact
- Must be inclusive in perspective
- Must be nonpartisan and/or should be accessible to communities across political spectrum
- Must be accessible and welcoming of all attendees.

General Guidelines & Policies

Solicitation

To preserve the capacity for open discussion, all attendees must refrain from fundraising or solicitation. Organizations that solicit funds should be represented by individuals whose roles involve programming and/or policy, and not by fundraising or development staff.

Recording

Audio and video recording of conference sessions, presentations, and performances by session applicants and other conference attendees is strictly prohibited. However, AFTA may tape or transcribe conference proceedings in accordance with venue A/V policies and with an explicit contracted agreement with artists and presenters.

Stipends

All presenters will be offered a complimentary registration to the Main Convention (June 12-14) a \$899 value and a stipend.

Stipend amounts will be determined by distance traveled by the presenters (one-way between their home base to Cincinnati). This decision is based on feedback from years past on the impact of travel on individuals submitting proposals. However, ***these stipends can be used toward any expense related to fully participating at your***

breakout session at AFTACON 2025. No receipts will need to be submitted and stipends will be paid after contract execution, prior to AFTACON 2025.

Home location of your breakout session presenters will not influence the decision making around whether your session is selected.

Stipend Brackets

(Stipend amounts will be determined by distance between the presenters' home base and Cincinnati.)

0-200 miles = \$200

201-500 miles = \$300

501-1,000 miles = \$400

1,001+ miles = \$500

We acknowledge that this stipend does not cover all costs, if your organization or community has other resources to give additional compensation we encourage that support. Presenters are also welcome to decline the stipend.

Note: If you have already registered for AFTACON 2025 and your session is selected, we will offer a refund on your registration.