2026 Reclaiming Vacant Properties Conference: Call for Session Proposals

September 22-25, 2026 | David L. Lawrence Convention Center | Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Overview

Reclaiming Vacant Properties (RVP) is the only national conference dedicated to strengthening neighborhoods to help address vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated properties. The 2026 conference marks nearly two decades as the nation's leading gathering on transforming vacant spaces into vibrant places. Now returning to the city where it started, RVP 2026 is both a homecoming and a chance to reflect on how far the field has come—celebrating the progress communities have made, learning from Pittsburgh's ongoing transformation, and paving the way for the next generation of revitalization leaders.

High quality conference sessions equip our attendees with the tools to effect change at home. If you are interested in submitting a session for RVP, please review the following guidelines and submit your session proposal(s) no later than **February 11, 2026, 11:59 PM ET**.

Proposal Submission Timeline

January 14, 2026	RFP released
February 11, 2026	Session proposal submission deadline
February 12, 2026 – March 20, 2026	Review period
April 1, 2026	Acceptance notifications

Evaluation Criteria

The Center for Community Progress evaluates all proposals using the following criteria:

- Clearly articulated focus and learning outcomes
- Thoughtful, cohesive, and well-written ideas and structure
- Showcases innovative and practical tools, strategies, policies, or programs
- Equips attendees with actionable ideas or relevant research to inform their work
- Presenters are qualified and relevant to the purpose and learning outcomes of the session
- Includes diverse voices that reflect the racial, ethnic, gender, and other diversity of the communities served
- Preference will be given to session proposals that include panelists from multiple geographies (e.g., multiple cities, states)

The following will result in disqualification. Disqualified proposals will not be evaluated.

- Incomplete session proposals
- Session proposals that appear to be a product or service promotion
- Session proposals received after the submission deadline of February 11, 2026

Session Proposal Submission Process and Format

Session proposals must be **submitted online** and include the following:

Session Organizer

The submitter or session organizer will be the primary point of contact. If the proposal is accepted, session organizers will be responsible for:

- Confirming the session title and description by **March 30, 2026**
- Confirming session moderators and speakers by **March 30, 2026**
- Organizing session content and scheduling calls with session moderators and speakers

Session Type

Session proposals must identify which type of session the organizer is submitting.

Breakout Sessions

Breakout sessions are 60 minutes in length and can be organized in a variety of ways (for example: roundtable discussions, hands-on exercises, debates, or panel presentations). **Breakout sessions may not have more than four speakers, including the moderator**. Please note that sessions may have up to 200 attendees.

- **Panel Presentation:** Sessions where speakers present a project or series of projects to provide participants with actionable information, revitalization tactics, and case studies.

- **Roundtable Discussions:** Sessions where speakers will facilitate conversation about a specific topic, tool, or strategy.

- **Hands-On Workshops:** Sessions with direct participation where attendees learn specific skills or tools.

- **Other**

Poster Sessions

Poster sessions are an opportunity for practitioners to share success stories. Proposed posters should focus on a single, completed project and clearly present its development, execution, and results. Posters will be displayed throughout the conference and should tell the full story of your project independently, without requiring additional context.

Mobile Workshops

Mobile workshops are three or seven hours in length, including transport time. They bring the classroom into the community, typically by bus with some walking at selected stops. Mobile workshops are more than city tours; they are expected to include a strong learning component through site visits and engagement with local organizations, practitioners, or community leaders. Mobile workshop organizers are fully responsible for organizing their tours, stops, and speakers, with Community Progress serving in an advisory capacity. Only two seats are reserved on the bus for speakers, though additional speakers may meet the bus and participants at various stops along the workshop route. Please allow no more than two speakers at each stop.

Leadership development workshops are 60 minutes in length and are designed to teach practical tools to aid in the professional development of attendees. Rather than highlighting work from the field, these sessions dive into day-to-day leadership skills for attendees at various points in their professional journeys.

Session Title

Session titles should concisely describe the content of your session.

Session Description

Session descriptions will be used to market the session and will be displayed on our website, printed in the final program, and potentially included in other published materials. Try to limit background context and focus your description on what will be covered within the session. The session description should be no more than 150 words. **View session description examples »**

Community Progress reserves the right to edit proposed titles and session descriptions for clarity.

Key Takeaways

Learning objectives are the knowledge and skills that participants will gain by participating in your session. We ask that you provide three learning objectives. Please note that simply sharing information about an interesting program or project **does not** constitute an adequate learning objective. The session must explicitly address the relevance of any program or project presented for potential audience members and their communities. Each learning objective should be no more than 30 words.

Relevance and Field Application (Breakout Sessions Only)

Please share how this session showcases innovative, practical tools, strategies, policies, or programs, how it equips attendees with actionable ideas or relevant research to inform their work, and why it is timely or important for practitioners in the field.

Tour Length and Tour Stops (Mobile Tours Only)

Mobile tours can be half day (three hours) or full day (seven hours) length, inclusive of transportation time to and from the conference venue. We ask that you list between two and five locations you anticipate the tour stopping at or viewing, and what attendees will learn at each stop. Specific parcel addresses are not required at this stage, but please list the type of stop and learning objective accomplished at the stop.

Topic Areas (Breakout Sessions, Poster Sessions, Mobile Tours)

Applicants must align proposed sessions with at least one and **no more than two** of the topic areas below. The possible subjects listed under each topic simply provide examples and are not intended to be a comprehensive list of all possible subjects within each topic area.

- Arts, Placemaking, and Culture

    o Possible Subject Matter: Partnering with artists and arts organizations on vacant property reuse; using arts, placemaking, and culture to address neighborhood challenges resulting from public health, housing, and economic crisis; supporting economic development through placemaking or the arts; equitable, resident-driven development through creative placemaking; embedding arts and culture in larger community revitalization initiatives

- Code Enforcement and Rental Properties

    o Possible Subject Matter: Moving from reactive to proactive code enforcement of vacant and deteriorating properties; cost recovery; rental licensing and registration; maintaining high quality housing stock to prevent vacancy; leveraging code lien foreclosure tools; leveraging data to improve code enforcement practices; commercial code enforcement strategies and programs

- Disaster Recovery and Resilience

    o Possible Subject Matter: Proactive/preventative or reactive policies or programs to prepare for increased property vacancy and deterioration in the wake of natural or manmade disasters; making the case for vacant properties strategies within climate change adaptation and resilience plans

- Economic and Workforce Development

    o Possible Subject Matter: Strategies to unlock the economic potential in vacant properties (particularly in low-value property markets); initiatives to support wealth- and asset-building for residents; leveraging vacant buildings and lots to support job creation; vacant commercial and industrial property reuse; commercial corridor revitalization; brownfields

- Building Stabilization and Rehab

- o Possible Subject Matter: Creative financing mechanisms for rehab or reuse of residential, commercial, or industrial properties; property deconstruction or demolition strategies; rehabilitation of vacant properties for quality affordable housing; wealth preservation through housing market stabilization; heirs' property; alternative ownership models; rehab programs that focus on improving building performance and resiliency; historic preservation strategies; access to capital for rehab

- Cross Sector Partnerships

  - o Possible Subject Matter: Partnering with anchor institutions and philanthropic entities; Opportunity Zones; attracting mission-oriented developers; revitalizing business districts; revitalizing commercial properties; partnerships with local law enforcement; partnerships with local hospitals and other public health organizations; improving public health by addressing vacancy and abandonment

- Land Banks and Land Banking

  - o Possible Subject Matter: Management, transparency, and oversight; funding mechanisms; successful partnerships; innovative acquisition, disposition, rehabilitation and maintenance programs; community engagement

- Mortgage and Tax Foreclosure

  - o Possible Subject Matter: Delinquent tax enforcement systems and innovations to address vacant and deteriorated properties; sale of property tax liens; preventing mortgage foreclosure; equitable reuse of REO properties; complying to changing legal environments

- Planning, Data, and Evaluation

  - o Possible Subject Matter: Property data systems and cross-department collaboration on data; understanding markets and market-informed approaches; comprehensive planning for vacant properties and revitalization; measuring progress; evaluating success

- Vacant Land Stewardship

  - o Possible Subject Matter: Reuse options like green infrastructure or energy production; urban conservation; positioning vacant land to address climate change; innovative finance models; community wealth-building through vacant land reuse; effective maintenance strategies; funding and ownership structures for long-term alternative use; acquisition and disposition strategies

- State and Federal Policy and Programs

  - o Possible Subject Matter: Navigating federal or state funding opportunities like ARPA, CDBG-DR, FEMA, USDA; making the case for funding; partnering effectively; advocacy models for local, state, or federal policy reform

Topic Areas (Leadership Development Sessions)

Applicants must align proposed sessions with **one** of the topic areas below. Session topics are starting points to consider, but we welcome proposals from outside of the listed topics as well.

- Leadership Presence

- Media Training

- Teambuilding or Team Management

- Managing Time and Energy

- Organizational Operations or Finance

- Cultural Competency

- Other (fill in)

Intended Audience

Session proposals must identify the intended audience for the session:

- Beginner (1-3 years of experience in topic area)

- Intermediate (3-6 years)

- Advanced (7+ years)

Speakers and Moderators

We strongly recommend that speakers and moderators are confirmed prior to proposal submission. Session selection is partly based on speakers. **You will be required to submit contact information for speakers and moderators.**

All speakers are required to register for the conference. The conference rate for speakers and moderators attending the entire conference is $150. There is no fee for speakers who are only attending their session. Breakout sessions and leadership development sessions can have up to four speakers, including the moderator. Mobile tours can have up to four speakers listed, but only the two speakers guiding the tour on the bus qualify for the discounted speaker rate. Poster sessions can have up to two speakers.

Additional Information

- Be creative! Preference will be given to sessions with an innovative, interactive format that engages participants.
- Community Progress reserves the right to combine compatible proposals. If we determine your proposal must be combined with another to be accepted, we will contact you to discuss how to proceed.

Contact Information

Questions about this proposal process should be directed to Julia Zimmerman at events@communityprogress.org. We will do our best to address all questions, however, **questions received less than 72 hours prior to the February 11, 2026 deadline may not receive a response**.