



Rocky Mountain Land Use Institute
UNIVERSITY OF DENVER

WESTERN PLACES | WESTERN SPACES 2027 CONFERENCE

• MARCH 4-5 • 2027 • DENVER, CO

Request for Speaker Proposals



RUNNING ON EMPTY?

Responding to Resource Constraints in the Rocky Mountain West



The Rocky Mountain West is at a critical crossroads. Defined by its breathtakingly broad landscapes and a frontier spirit of independence and expansion, the region is increasingly caught between the historic momentum of growth and the present reality of severe environmental, infrastructural, fiscal/economic, and regulatory limits.

Land use planning and resource management today feels less like charting a path of open possibilities and more like *running on empty*.

Learning to help our communities live well with less will require a hard look at our limits and the overlapping pressures impacting the modern West....and using our legendary creative and innovative spirit to imagine new and better ways of supporting thriving, equitable communities.

At the Rocky Mountain Land Use Institute's 2027 Western Places | Western Spaces Conference, we'll do just that -- bringing together land use attorneys, city planners, policymakers, developers, and natural resource managers to examine how the region can best adapt in an era defined by serious constraints. Over two days of expert panel presentations and critical discussions, attendees will explore how practitioners are implementing innovative legal frameworks, regulatory and zoning reforms, conservation strategies, and planning practices to address the following topics:

TOPICS & TRACKS

Water: Shrinking winter snowpacks, prolonged drought, and declining river levels mean less reliable water for a growing population. The Land Use Impact: Communities increasingly tie development approvals directly to demonstrated, long-term water supplies. This tension has sparked battles over practices of converting agricultural water rights to municipal use, enforcing strict water conservation mandates in local building codes, and restricting water-intensive industrial projects like data centers. How can we best integrate water supply assurances into development approvals, adopt effective water-efficiency standards, incentivize recycled water infrastructure, and encourage more water-conscious community designs?

Energy: Surging electricity demand from tech infrastructure and electrification has collided with constrained transmission capacity, permitting backlogs, and utility constraints. The Land Use Impact: Siting new energy generation and transmission infrastructure triggers fierce local-state friction while energy bottlenecks slow or prevent desired community development. How can we grapple with these issues, along with how to accommodate heavy industrial loads while protecting everyday ratepayers from skyrocketing costs and managing grid reliability?

Housing: High housing costs and inadequate supply relative to demand are exacerbated by limited usable land for development and the necessity to curb low-density patterns and urban sprawl. The Land Use Impact: State legislatures have recently stepped in to impose state regulations and to preempt local land use laws, creating ongoing legal tensions between state mandates and municipal home-rule authority. How can we address these issues while incentivizing the development of more affordable housing? How can we create and sustain local investments and maximize federal funding? How can regulatory reform bring down the cost of housing?

Transportation & Mobility: How can we improve public transportation, bike/pedestrian infrastructure, and mobility options to ensure equitable access to housing, healthcare, and other resources?

Small Towns & Rural Communities: Small towns and rural communities are especially impacted by resource constraints. What challenges most affect these communities, and what strategies, tools, and investments can best help?

Land Conservation & Open Space: Relentless expansion and low-density residential development have steadily chewed up open space, threatening biodiversity in the Rocky Mountain West. How can we better utilize environmental overlay districts, conservation easements, wildlife migration corridor protections, or other measures to prevent the permanent fragmentation of the region's remaining natural and agricultural landscapes?

Wildfire/Disaster Mitigation & Climate Resilience: Escalating wildfire risks, extreme weather, and aridification leave very little room for error in the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI). The Land Use Impact: Local governments are facing difficult legal questions regarding whether—and how—to restrict new construction in high-risk wildfire or flood zones. How do we deal with enforcing mandatory defensible space and strict hazard mitigation codes to support public safety, while addressing private property rights and takings claims?

Legislative Developments & Legal Issues: What intellectual or regulatory infrastructure is holding us back or hindering our ability to meet the needs of the future? What are the most important legal issues impacting land use and real estate development this year? What legislative efforts will allow for, or stifle, innovation and progress? What issues should we be monitoring? How should our regulatory systems and approaches be updated to better support our goals and objectives?

Planning Practice & Community Engagement | Emerging Tools, Technologies, & Techniques: What new tools and technologies, like AI, can help us plan better, assess the limitations facing our communities, make more equitable, strategic, and data-driven decisions, and/or improve professional practice?

Economic/Fiscal Challenges:

The last few years have shed spotlight on the huge challenges the Rocky Mountain West faces in an era of declining state tax revenue, reduced federal investments, the high cost of money, etc. How can we re-examine fiscal/taxation policies, public-private partnerships, and creative ways of financing to help our communities do more with less?

Professional Responsibility & Ethics
(For professional planners and attorneys).

PREPARING YOUR PROPOSAL

Proposals should be submitted using the [online form](#). You can also find the link on the conference website. We recommend that you use the sample form (below) to collect all your information first, as the online form will not save your information until it has been submitted.

For **sessions** and **tours**, be prepared with the following information: title, description, outline, learning objectives, and speaker information. You should also be prepared to describe how your session supports the conference theme and highlighted topics (see page 4), as well as how you will engage with participants during your session.

The **title** and **description** of your session will be used not only in evaluating your proposal, but also for marketing and accreditation materials if your session is accepted. Titles should catch the reader's attention, and the description should let the audience know what the session will cover. For examples, please refer to programs from past conferences on our website.

The session **outline** provides the Selection Committee with a more in-depth look at how your session will be structured, the topics you plan to address, and the issues that each speaker will cover. You should also include any points that help your session provide continuing education credits. Use a simple format like a basic bulleted list.

Learning objectives describe what lessons participants will take away from the sessions. These are not only used in evaluation criteria, but also for obtaining continuing education credits for the conference.

Moderators and speakers should be able to demonstrate content expertise in the topic, as well as be engaging to the audience. Session panelists should offer diverse perspectives and be prepared to discuss how tools and methodologies can be transferred to other cities and towns. Individual speakers should consider what additional value they can bring to an existing panel and what topics they would like to discuss.

Please adhere to the following guidelines when preparing your proposal:

- Proposals are due by September 12, 2026.
- Please review the Western Places | Western Spaces conference theme and the highlighted topics to make sure your session is a good fit for the conference.
- Comply with word limitations.
- Limit panel-style sessions to one moderator and no more than three speakers.
- Panels should present a variety of perspectives, and represent different geographic, ethnic, and gender diversity.

Please provide all the information requested. Incomplete proposals will not be considered.

WAYS TO APPLY

Panel Sessions

We are primarily looking for sessions that address the theme and topics of this year's conference but could focus on other "hot topic" issues. Sessions are 90 minutes in length and should include 30 minutes for audience engagement. Panels typically consist of 2-3 speakers plus a moderator.

Speakers

A speaker nomination is a good option for those who may not be able to develop a full session but could lend their expertise to fill out an existing panel. RMLUI will work with session organizers to add selected speakers to increase depth and diversity of existing sessions.

Off-Site Tours

We also welcome proposals for tours that showcase projects, themes (such as housing, mobility, or urban gardens), or new development. Tours are usually 3.5 - 4 hours long, including transportation to and from the site (transportation is provided by RMLUI). Tours can be concentrated in one location or visit two or three locations centered around a common theme.

SELECTION CRITERIA

RMLUI seeks to provide a broad selection of offerings focused on the conference theme, highlighting innovative developments, and covering the topics listed on the next page.

Sessions are required to have multiple presenters who should represent geographic diversity as well as different view points.

RMLUI provides continuing education credits for legal and planning professionals. We will ask session organizers to provide information on how the session meets the criteria on submission form. You can find the guidelines on the [RMLUI conference page](#).

Sessions should strive to:

- Provide useful and practical knowledge participants can use in their own work;
- Address current issues trending in the land use and development communities and/or present innovative tools and case studies of current projects;
- Offer diverse perspectives with speakers from across the region with different perspectives and backgrounds; and
- Engage the audience in a meaningful way.

ABOUT THE CONFERENCE

RMLUI's annual Western Places | Western Spaces conference explores growth and development issues facing communities in the Rocky Mountain region— from large cities to small towns—as well as concerns about managing/preserving the West's natural resources and heritage. Each year, the event serves as the place for land use & development professionals in the West to share knowledge, resources, and to network. With four hundred attendees annually, this event helps define and influence the West's land use and development future. The conference attracts people from across the country, but most attendees are from the Rocky Mountain West states: Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming. Our conference attendees typically represent national, state, and local government agencies, private planning and design firms, law firms, real estate and development companies, research, policy, and academic institutions, foundations and nonprofit organizations. The conference takes place at the University of Denver campus on a Thursday and Friday in early March, and includes a keynote, a lunch plenary, panel sessions, and occasional off-site tours.

INTERESTED IN SPONSORING THE 2027 CONFERENCE?

Our annual conference wouldn't be possible without the generous support of our sponsors. Conference sponsorship provides visibility and underscores your company's commitment to sustainable, informed, and ethical land use & development practices. For more information on sponsorship opportunities, please contact: Cindy Lane or Susan Daggett.

NEXT STEPS

Apply Online

Applications must be submitted online by September 12, 2026. If you have questions or issues applying online, please contact us (see below).

Proposal Review

The Selection Committee will review all complete proposals and make a final decision by (tentatively) late September. RMLUI reserves the right to make changes to sessions, including adding speakers and/or combining sessions with similar content.

Timeline

Sept. 12, 2026: Speaker Proposals Due

Late Sept. 2026: Proposal Decisions

Nov. 2026: Conference Registration Opens

March 4-5, 2027: Conference

Questions?

Please contact:

Cindy Lane

RMLUI Program Manager
cindy.lane@du.edu

or

Susan Daggett

RMLUI Executive Director
susan.daggett@du.edu

2027 Request for Speaker Proposals | SAMPLE FORM

The following sample form can be used to help prepare your proposal offline.

Once you've drafted your proposal, please copy/paste responses into **the online submission form** [here](#).

If you have questions or issues, please email Cindy Lane at: cindy.lane@du.edu.

Proposal submissions are due **September 12, 2026**.

PLEASE PROVIDE **CONTACT INFORMATION** FOR YOUR PROPOSAL:

First Name:

Last Name:

Email:

Phone:

PLEASE SELECT THE **TYPE OF PROPOSAL** YOU ARE SUBMITTING:

(Select One):

☐ Session (panels, roundtables, workshops, & tours)

☐ Individual Speaker

PLEASE SELECT YOUR **AVAILABILITY** TO PRESENT:

(Select all that apply):

☐ Wednesday, March 3, 2027 (*Wednesday is for workshop proposals only*)

☐ Thursday, March 4, 2027

☐ Friday, March 5, 2027

PLEASE SELECT THE CONFERENCE **TOPIC TRACK** MOST APPLICABLE TO YOUR PROPOSAL:

(Select all that apply):

☐ Water

☐ Energy

☐ Housing

☐ Transportation & Mobility

☐ Small Towns & Rural Communities

☐ Land Conservation & Open Space

☐ Wildfire/Disaster Mitigation and Climate Resilience

☐ Legislative Developments & Legal Issues

☐ Planning Practice & Community Engagement: Emerging Tools, Technologies, & Techniques

☐ Economic/Fiscal Challenges

☐ Professional Responsibility & Ethics

If you are proposing a **SESSION**,
please provide the following information:

SESSION FORMAT:

(Select one).

- ☐ Panel Presentation with Moderator
- ☐ Roundtable Discussion with Moderator
- ☐ Workshop
- ☐ Off-Site Tour

SESSION TITLE:

SESSION DESCRIPTION:

Please generally describe what topics your session will cover. If you are proposing an off-site tour, please note the tour location. (This summary will be used for the conference program). (150 words max).

SESSION OUTLINE:

Please provide a detailed outline of how your session will be structured, the topics you plan to address, and the issues that each speaker will cover. Include any points that will help your session provide continuing education credits. (250 word max).

SESSION LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

Please provide at least 3 learning objectives that each attendee should be able to attain by the end of your session. (150 word max).

SESSION AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION:

Please share how your session will engage with audience participants (e.g., audience Q&A, polling, etc.) (100 word max).

SESSION PRESENTER INFORMATION:

Please list the following information for EACH ONE of your session presenters/speakers.

- Name
- Title/Organization
- Location (city/state)
- Email address
- A very brief description of their area of expertise
- Note the topic they will discuss
- Note their role in the session (e.g. moderator, speaker)

If you are submitting a proposal as an **INDIVIDUAL SPEAKER**,
please provide the following information:

Note: This section is for individuals who would like to submit their name as a potential speaker to be added to our other sessions (panel presentations, roundtable discussions, etc.) Please fill out the information below to help us identify topics and sessions for which you would be a good fit.

SPEAKER NAME:

SPEAKER BIO:

Please provide a short bio explaining your professional qualifications. (250 words max).

SPEAKER AREAS OF EXPERTISE:

For each of the conference topic track areas you selected above, please provide a brief explanation (3-5 sentences) of what you would like to present within that topic area. (250 words max).

SPEAKER LINKEDIN:

If you would like to share your LinkedIn profile URL, please do so here (optional):