

Higher Learning PHOENIX 2027

April 17-19



Proposal Submission Guide

As our leading higher ed conference moves to a new city to connect with our nationally dispersed membership, we invite you to share your insights with HLC's community in pursuit of innovation and continuous improvement.



Proposals are due on September 14, 2026 at 11:59 p.m. CT

What to Know Before You Start Your Proposal

- All proposals must be submitted through our [online submission portal](#). You'll provide a title (10-word limit) and description (50-word limit), select a track, and answer prompts about the format, content and applicability of your session.
- **NEW FOR 2027:** You'll select a preferred session length and provide details about the depth of your content. We encourage sessions that provide foundational, practical guidance as well as advanced examinations of innovative approaches and emerging issues. There is limited availability for 75-minute sessions in addition to typical 45-minute presentations.
- Decisions will be sent in November. Presenters receive a discounted rate through the registration link sent in the acceptance email.

What We're Looking For

We encourage presentations that:

- Demonstrate measurable impact
- Foster interactive, engaging, open discussions
- Offer takeaways for multiple types of institutions
- Feature multiple perspectives, preferably across institutions
- Have clear and specific titles and descriptions
- Are related to the tracks
- Provide new insights in the field

Presentation Tracks

We invite proposals that address:

Institutional Experiences With Accreditation

How does your institution engage in ongoing activities and reviews to meet HLC requirements and pursue continuous improvement?

- Advancing quality through implementation of the 2025 Criteria for Accreditation
- Capitalizing on mission and vision in the accreditation process
- Reimagining the role of Accreditation Liaison Officers (ALOs) as institutional change leaders
- Demonstrating quality across multi-campus, online and hybrid learning environments
- Building support and capacity for the accreditation process across the institution
- Promoting a culture of quality beyond compliance and reporting
- Sharing lessons learned from evaluations, substantive change and monitoring
- Developing, implementing and measuring impact of Quality Initiatives
- Using emerging technologies to strengthen accreditation processes

Student Learning and Success

How does your institution provide meaningful, transformative learning and support students' progress toward goals across evolving educational and workforce needs?

- Redefining success for today's learners and tomorrow's workforce
- Creating learner-centered environments that foster engagement
- Implementing effective teaching and assessment practices that promote improvement of student learning
- Using analytics and student success data to improve outcomes
- Enhancing teaching, learning and student support through AI and digital tools
- Advancing mental health, well-being and holistic student development
- Supporting learners across modalities, locations and educational pathways
- Reimagining faculty development for emerging pedagogies and technologies that serve the unique needs of faculty
- Advancing workforce-relevant learning, microcredentials and competency-based education
- Bridging academic affairs, student affairs and support services
- Designing inclusive learning environments for changing student populations
- Preparing learners for civic engagement, career success and lifelong learning
- Developing sustainable funding models for student success, academic support and learner engagement initiatives

Future-Focused Institutional Improvement

How does your institution redefine quality, leverage evidence to demonstrate institutional improvement and build resilient cultures that strive for excellence in an era of rapid change?

- Demonstrating institutional value to students, employers, policymakers and communities
- Strengthening public trust, transparency and accountability in higher ed
- Improving data governance, analytics and evidence-informed decision making
- Using AI and emerging technologies to strengthen your effectiveness
- Maintaining mission-focused improvement amid leadership and organizational transitions
- Partnering with students in institutional improvement
- Building data literacy and using dashboards, metrics and reporting tools to evaluate the effectiveness of programs, services and initiatives
- Aligning assessment, planning, budgeting and resource allocation processes
- Integrating quality assurance activities across academic, student affairs and administrative units
- Using cost modeling, forecasting and analysis of financial risks to guide institutional improvement decisions

Advances in Leadership and Strategy

How does your institution navigate disruption, seize opportunities, innovate and build sustainable futures in an increasingly complex higher ed landscape?

- Maximizing strategic foresight, scenario planning and future-oriented leadership
- Planning for future financial sustainability and mission-driven resource stewardship
- Implementing data-informed, strategic approaches to prepare for enrollment, demographic and workforce shifts
- Building governance models that support agility, responsiveness and accountability
- Leading through uncertainty, disruption and change
- Developing AI strategy, governance and organizational readiness
- Building resilience through culture, collaboration and adaptive leadership
- Creating new partnership models, ecosystem approaches and cross-sector collaboration
- Balancing mission, innovation and sustainability in changing environments
- Advancing organizational effectiveness through talent development and succession planning
- Navigating changing regulatory, policy and funding expectations

Please note: These presentation topics are intended as examples to guide you in selecting a track. This is not a comprehensive list of presentation topics within each track, nor an indication of which proposals HLC will select.

To highlight work from across the higher ed landscape, some proposals may be combined by HLC into joint panel sessions. Proposal submitters will receive more information on presentation formats once decisions are made in November 2026.

Guidelines for Submitting Your Proposal

Please create and submit your proposal in the submission portal. After you create an account and log in, you'll have prompts to address to complete your proposal. You may save and continue your draft as needed. Keep in mind:

- You may have up to three presenters per presentation.
- All presentations will be delivered entirely in person at the conference in Phoenix.
- Abstracts should accurately reflect the content you plan to present.
- HLC encourages proposals on overcoming challenges related to accreditation. However, we will not select proposals related to monitoring or other follow up activity that is ongoing for the institution at the time of selection. We will not select proposals from HLC-accredited institutions that are not in good standing with HLC.
- Proposals that feature tools, products or services available for purchase by colleges and universities are not appropriate to submit through this proposal process. HLC's Sponsor Prospectus will be available in fall 2026 outlining options for showcase presentations.
- By submitting a proposal, you agree to the Terms and Conditions for Participation (hlcommission.org/conference-terms).

Registering for the Conference

All presenters must register for the conference as an attendee. However, presenters receive a discount on registration. Please refer to your proposal decision email which will be sent in November 2026 to ensure you receive the correct rate.

Proposals are due on September 14, 2026 at 11:59 p.m. CT.

Rubric for Proposal Review

Evaluation Principles	Needs Work	Good	Excellent
Completeness	The proposal lacks detail on session content.	The proposal provides a general understanding of the presentation topic.	The proposal provides a clear idea of what will be presented.
Track Alignment	The proposal does not align with any tracks.	The proposal aligns with a track but lacks justification for track selection.	The proposal aligns with a track and justification is clearly presented.
Session Design	The proposal lacks structure to present the information.	The proposal provides an overview of the organization but lacks detail.	The proposal plan for delivery supports time allotment and objectives.
Appeal and Applicability	The proposal is specialized and may have limited appeal to attendees.	The proposal is of relevance to attendees but may not be applicable to certain audiences.	The proposal is applicable to a variety of attendees and institutional types.
Supporting Evidence	The proposal provides little evidence to support the topic or does not demonstrate that the work is sufficiently developed for the proposed session.	The proposal includes preliminary findings, examples or research appropriate to the current stage of the work, providing a reasonable foundation for the session.	The proposal presents evidence, examples, research or outcomes that are appropriate to the maturity of the work and effectively support the session's key messages.
Impact Potential	The proposal does not offer new or substantive approaches to the topic.	The proposal offers basic information but may have potential for impact.	The proposal is relevant and has the potential to inform practice or policy in higher ed.
Learning Outcomes	The proposal provides vague or too-specific information. Outcomes are unclear or disconnected from the content.	The proposal identifies learning outcomes that are clearly aligned with the content and relevant to participants.	The proposal clearly articulates what participants will know or be able to do after the session, with takeaways that are specific, actionable and directly applicable.

Sample Proposals

These examples should provide guidance for what information to include in your proposal submission. The proposal process is adjusted each year based on HLC's needs for the conference, so prompts in the current proposal submission portal may differ from these examples. They should not be replicated exactly and do not indicate which proposals HLC will select.

Sample Proposal A

Proposal Title

Reenergizing Assessment Through Institutional Listening

Proposal Type

Institutional

Proposal Track

Student Learning and Student Success

Session Format

45-Minute Session

Participant Experience Level

Foundational

Presentation Description

This presentation discusses our process of re-energizing faculty and staff for assessment of student learning through a series of listening sessions with an HLC consultant and institutional reflection. We share our institution's assessment "pain points" and how they informed a revitalized assessment plan focused on meaningful institutional improvement.

Session Content and Design

This session explores how our institution moved beyond a status quo approach to assessment by engaging faculty, administrators, and staff in a structured institutional listening process.

We begin by describing the challenges that prompted our work and the role HLC's *Assessing the Joys of Assessment* workshop played in encouraging us to take a different approach. We then share the structure of the consultation process and the assessment "pain points" identified through conversations with stakeholders across campus.

The second half of the session focuses on how those findings informed revisions to our assessment processes, including the redesign of our undergraduate core curriculum assessment and the creation of a roadmap for broader institutional change.

Participants will engage throughout the session by reflecting on their own assessment practices and discussing questions they would want an outside consultant to explore at their institution.

Session Agenda

- **Setting the Stage: The Joy of Assessment** (5 minutes)
- **Looking in the Mirror: Assessing Our Assessment Structure and Processes** (10 minutes)
- **Case Exemplar: Igniting Enthusiasm in Core Curriculum Assessment—New Questions, New Answers** (15 minutes)
- **Building a Consultation Scaffold for Your Institution** (15 minutes)

The 45-minute format allows participants to learn from an institutional case study while engaging in guided reflection that helps them identify practical next steps for their own campuses.

Evidence and Outcomes

The assessment of our assessment process began in Fall 2022 when the university engaged an external consultant to facilitate a campus-wide listening process. Prior to the visit, the consultant reviewed institutional assessment materials, including policies, HLC reports, and examples of school and program assessment reports. Working with campus leaders, the consultant identified key objectives for the consultation: advancing our assessment process, improving efficiency, and generating more meaningful information about student learning.

Although our institution had university-wide support for assessment, the consultation revealed several significant barriers to meaningful improvement. Professional schools struggled to align institutional assessment expectations with specialized accreditation requirements. Our reporting structure lacked the flexibility to meet the needs of different academic programs. Feedback provided through the university assessment committee was not consistently leading to meaningful change. Assessment of the undergraduate core curriculum generated substantial amounts of data but had limited impact on faculty practice or student learning.

The two-day listening process provided the foundation for the consultant's report, which became the blueprint for a Provost-appointed Task Force to Advance Student Learning. Five workgroups were established to address University Learning Outcomes, Assessment for Professional Schools and Specialized Accreditation, Co-Curricular Assessment, the work of the University Assessment Committee, and Core Curriculum Assessment.

By the time of the conference, multiple implementation cycles of the redesigned core assessment process will have been completed, and workgroups will have advanced recommendations across each focus area. Early outcomes include increased faculty enthusiasm for assessment, richer conversations about student learning, and a reimagined process for using assessment findings to guide improvements in teaching and learning.

Participants will leave with a practical model for using structured institutional listening to identify barriers, build campus ownership, and create a roadmap for meaningful assessment reform.

Attendee Takeaways

This session is designed for faculty leaders, assessment professionals, academic administrators, and peer reviewers seeking practical approaches to strengthening institutional assessment.

After participating, attendees will be able to:

- Describe how a structured institutional listening process can reveal barriers to meaningful assessment.
- Identify practical strategies for re-engaging faculty and staff in assessment of student learning.
- Adapt elements of the consultation framework to examine and strengthen assessment practices at their own institutions.

Track Alignment

This proposal aligns with the **Student Learning and Success** track by demonstrating how institutions can strengthen assessment of student learning through intentional reflection, faculty engagement, and organizational change. HLC Core Component 4B continues to be one of the most frequently cited components in the peer review process, and many institutions have invested in assessment systems that emphasize reporting over improvement. This session shares a practical approach to moving beyond compliance by using structured listening and institutional reflection to build a more meaningful culture of assessment.

Presenter Relationship to Topic

The presenters led and participated in the institutional assessment review described in this proposal. They worked directly with the consultant, helped facilitate the campus listening process, served on implementation workgroups, and continue to lead the ongoing redesign of assessment practices across the institution.

Sample Proposal B

Proposal Title

Building Institutional Governance for Responsible AI Use

Proposal Type

Institutional

Proposal Track

Advances in Leadership and Strategy

Session Format

45-Minute Session

Participant Experience Level

Advanced Concepts

Presentation Description

[Institution] established a comprehensive Committee for Responsible AI Use to address the ethical, academic, and operational implications of artificial intelligence. This session examines the strategic decisions, governance structures, and institutional lessons that informed our approach and offers participants a framework for adapting AI governance to their own institutional context.

Session Content and Design

Artificial intelligence presents institutions with opportunities to enhance teaching, learning, research, and operations while raising complex questions about governance, ethics, policy, and institutional readiness. Rather than focusing on individual AI tools, this session examines how one institution developed a coordinated, institution-wide approach to responsible AI use.

The session begins by exploring the rationale for establishing the Committee for Responsible AI Use and the strategic decisions involved in developing a governance structure that represented academic affairs, operations, and institutional leadership. Presenters will discuss how the committee balances innovation with ethical considerations while responding to rapidly evolving technologies.

The presentation then examines key initiatives developed through the committee, including guidance for responsible AI use in pedagogy and research, approaches to operational integration, and develop-

ment of institutional policies. Throughout the session, presenters will highlight the challenges encountered, the alternative approaches considered, and the lessons learned through implementation.

Participants will engage through facilitated discussion as presenters pose questions about governance structures, institutional priorities, and emerging challenges. Rather than identifying a single "best" approach, the session encourages participants to evaluate which governance strategies are most appropriate for their own institutional context.

The 45-minute format supports a focused exploration of a complex institutional issue while allowing participants to analyze strategic decisions, compare approaches, and discuss implications with colleagues.

Evidence and Outcomes

Recognizing the rapid evolution of artificial intelligence and its potential impact on higher education, [Institution] established the Committee for Responsible AI Use to develop a coordinated institutional approach to addressing AI across teaching, research, governance, and operations.

The committee includes a Steering Committee supported by three subcommittees focused on Operations, Governance, and Academics. This structure ensures diverse representation from across the university while providing a coordinated process for evaluating emerging technologies, developing institutional guidance, and responding to new challenges.

Implementation milestones included establishing committee charges, creating a framework for reviewing AI tools, developing guidance for responsible AI use in pedagogy and research, and initiating campus-wide conversations regarding policy development and operational integration.

As implementation progressed, the committee encountered several complex questions requiring strategic decision-making, including balancing innovation with ethical considerations, addressing faculty and student concerns, protecting data privacy, and adapting governance processes to rapidly changing AI technologies. These discussions informed the development of guidance documents, strengthened interdisciplinary collaboration, and increased institutional awareness of responsible AI use.

By the time of the conference, the institution will have completed multiple cycles of committee work and policy development. Participants will gain insight into both the governance structure and the institutional decision-making processes that continue to guide implementation.

The session emphasizes lessons that extend beyond artificial intelligence. Participants will examine a governance framework that can be adapted to address emerging technologies and other institution-wide challenges requiring collaboration across academic and administrative units.

Attendee Takeaways

This session is designed for institutional leaders, academic administrators, faculty leaders, accreditation professionals, and academic technology specialists who are involved in institutional planning, governance, or policy development related to emerging technologies.

After participating, attendees will be able to:

- Analyze the governance structures and strategic decisions involved in developing an institution-wide approach to responsible AI use.
- Evaluate alternative approaches for balancing innovation, ethics, policy, and operational priorities within their own institutional context.
- Identify governance principles and decision-making strategies that can be adapted to other emerging institutional challenges.

Track Alignment

This proposal aligns with the **Advances in Leadership and Strategy** track by examining how institutional leaders can respond strategically to emerging technologies through collaborative governance, policy development, and cross-functional decision-making. Rather than focusing on AI implementation alone, the session explores how institutions can build adaptable governance structures that balance innovation, ethics, academic priorities, and operational considerations while preparing for future institutional challenges.

Presenter Relationship to Topic

The presenters established and continue to lead [Institution]'s Committee for Responsible AI Use. Collectively, they represent institutional leadership, academic affairs, governance, teaching and learning, and academic technology. They developed the committee structure, guided implementation of its initiatives, and continue to oversee institutional policy development and campus engagement related to responsible AI use.