Conference presentations

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES AND CRITERIA

The following guidelines have been developed to assist you with submitting a conference presentation abstract proposal for the aes26 International Evaluation Conference.

Submission deadline: **19 March 2026**

Contents

Presentation type formats

2026 conference presentations are being delivered face-to-face in Darwin, Australia. There is no option for virtual presentations.

This year the conference is offering seven different presentation formats. Applicants should choose the most suitable format for their submission. Further detail on each of the presentation formats is presented below.

When preparing a proposal, applicants are asked to keep in mind:

- Presentations should be interactive and promote dialogue and discussion – please avoid 'lecture' style presentations.

- Presentations should be practical and applied, focusing on things such as new and innovative tools, methods or approaches.

- Presentations that involve cross-sector collaboration and discussion are strongly encouraged.

- Promotional proposals that are pitches for commercial tools, apps, or AI products, rather than scholarly, practice-based, or reflective contributions will not be accepted for aes26. If you wish to promote or demonstrate a tool, product, or service, opportunities are available through the conference exhibition. Please contact the AES office for information about exhibition packages. We appreciate your support in ensuring the program remains focused on high-quality evaluation content.

1. Ignite

Length	Presentation length: Maximum 5 minutes Total presentation duration: 6 minutes
Format	Ignite presentations use 20 slides that auto-advance every 15 seconds. The result is a short, insightful and informative presentation, with no Q&A. For examples of the format see http://www.ignitetalks.io/.
Objective	Deliver rapid-fire, sharp insights into the theory and practice of evaluation, making compelling points that capture the audience's attention and push them beyond their usual perspectives.
Content	Ignite presentations cover up to three points strongly related to a central idea that every slide and every sentence supports. Ignite presentations may focus on: • Telling the story of an aspect of evaluation. • Sharing an entertaining or interesting story that explores new perspectives and challenges comfort zones. • Taking a fresh look at a tool or technique.

2. Short Paper

Length	Presentation length: Maximum 15 minutes Total presentation duration: 25 minutes
Format	A formal presentation with time for interactivity and questions from the audience at the end of the presentation.
Objective	To inspire new ways of thinking by sharing innovative work that sits within evaluation and/or at its intersections with related fields without needing to explain everything in full.
Content	Short papers present either: • An innovative evaluation or aspect of an evaluation offering fresh insights, especially where it intersects with related fields to inspire new ways of thinking. • A new idea, approach, or insight relevant to evaluators. They are concise and focused, highlighting key findings, methods, and significance clearly within a limited time.

3. Long Paper

Length	Presentation length: Maximum 25 minutes Total presentation duration: 50 minutes
Format	A presentation usually given by one person, with up to 25 minutes for interaction with the audience at the end.
Objective	Critical, in-depth engagement on a topic to provide information and insights, deep reflection and stimulate discussion using targeted and skilfully selected content on the topic. More in-depth information may cover core findings, methodology and significance.
Content	The presentation may focus on: • New or better ways to improve part of the evaluation process. • Identification of a new or emerging issue in the field of evaluation that is driving significant change. • Explaining the rationale, process, benefits, and challenges of a new evaluation method or data approach. • Critiquing an evaluation methodology or method. • Approaches to working with specific stakeholder groups or in specific contexts. *Continued next page*

	• Showcasing innovative work that sits within evaluation or at its intersections with related fields, offering fresh insights and inspiring new ways of thinking. **Tip:** If you have multiple experts on the same topic and the value of the presentation would come from conversations between these experts, please submit a panel presentation instead.

4. Panel

Length	Presentation length: Maximum 35 minutes Total presentation duration: 50 minutes
Format	The panel may feature: • Up to three panellists (plus a moderator) who have challenged conventional evaluation methods or navigated complex terrains in innovative ways, bringing diverse perspectives, disciplines, or roles to respectfully explore a key theme. • Two experts with distinct, original, or opposing views engaging in a conversation on a specific topic. The final 15 minutes are allocated for audience interaction.
Objective	Bring together a lively and thought-provoking discussion between insightful evaluators, commissioners, and stakeholders that challenge conventional thinking, led by a moderator to explore ideas beyond the usual perspectives. Your panel could consider unconscious biases, beliefs and assumptions.
Content	The format may cover: • weaving together innovative ideas, or • debating a topic, or • exploring concepts or critically reflecting from multiple perspectives, or • evaluators, program managers and service users reflecting on lessons from real-world practice. Panel abstracts must include names, organisations and country location of presenters.

4. Skill Building

Length	Total length: 50 minutes
Format	In a skill building presentation, the presenter delivers a demonstration or interactive mini workshop. Ideally, the presentation will enable attendees to practice a skill or use a concept or tool. In some cases, the presentation may be a demonstration of a concept or tool.
Objective	To rapidly build skills through teaching and applying a specific skill, concept or tool.
Content	Skill building presentations need a clear learning objective. Skill building presentations can focus on: • Foundational evaluation skills and capabilities. • Advanced evaluation capabilities • New tools Skills for applying innovative or cross-disciplinary approaches that expand how evaluation can be practiced.
Abstract	In your submission, identify: • The learning objective for the presentation. • Why this skill, tool or concept is important. • How you will teach the skill within the allocated time frame. How participants can expect to engage/interact.

Note: This presentation will be presented in a room set up in either cabaret or theatre format. Due to logistical constraints, we are unable to accommodate requests for alternative room setups.

6. Round Table

Length	Total length: 50 minutes
Format	Round tables are a new offering for 2026, an expansion of the previous Exploration Sessions.
	We invite you to nominate a topic that would benefit from collective expertise – something new, innovative, thought-provoking (and maybe still in its infancy). This format is suited to facilitators with a topic to debate, a big question to raise or an issue to address that will help develop dialogue and interaction with the evaluation community.
	Facilitators should think of themselves as the guide for the discussion. You should genuinely be open to exploring issues and hearing alternative viewpoints, accepting that you do not have the answers and are seeking input from conference attendees.
	Facilitators should briefly introduce the topic, why it matters and set the parameters for discussion. The presentation should then be highly interactive, provoking discussion between attendees and building connections. Consider also how you will feed back the findings from the presentation to participants in the presentation and/or after the presentation.
Objective	To rapidly build knowledge through fostering attendees' engagement in rich discussions with each other.
	Roundtable presentations may be best targeted at intermediate to advanced evaluators.
Content	Have a clear objective of what you are hoping to achieve through the interactive nature of the presentation. State how the content of your presentation could be applied by or be of interest to participants. Include points for debate or contention.
Abstract	In your submission, identify:
	• The topic and purpose for discussion.
	• Its relationship to the conference sub-themes.
	• How the roundtable presentation will benefit participants and the evaluation community.
	• How participants will be engaged and how you will promote interactivity.
	• How information will be fed back during and after the presentation.
	In your justification statement, note your experience in facilitating presentations of this format.
	Continued on next page

	On acceptance of a proposal for a roundtable presentation, the aes26 committee may wish to collaborate with the facilitators to suggest amendments to increase alignment with other conference content.

Note: This presentation will be presented in a room set up in either cabaret or theatre format. Due to logistical constraints we are unable to accommodate requests for alternative room setups.

7. Big Room Session

Length	Total length: 50 minutes
Format	Big Room Sessions offer an exciting opportunity to take the stage in the conference's largest space, designed for plenary keynotes and large-scale presentations.
	We are open to suggestions for different structures or formats, noting that as it is set up in cabaret format (allowing for audience interaction) with a stage. There is scope for workshop and other interactive-style activities that require open space, and moving around.
	This space is perfect for impactful presentations that captivate a wide audience and make use of the space.
Objective	Your stage, your vision! Utilise the space, attract a large audience and generate engaging discussion on topics or themes that are of wide appeal to the conference audience. There's plenty of room to reimagine how you engage, inspire, and inform.
Content	There is no fixed requirement in terms of content – we are open to innovative ideas or suggestions. Due to the size of the space, you should propose ideas for content that will appeal widely but also be suitable for lengths of time that are longer than some other formats. You may cover a variety of themes – our intent is not to limit ideas or proposals – we encourage you to think big and bold!

Note: The Big Room Session proposals will be reviewed by the conference committee against the review criteria.

Abstract proposal requirements

In the application process you are asked to select the sub-theme your presentation aligns to.

	All proposals, EXCEPT Ignites	Ignite presentations
Title	The title should be as brief as possible but long enough to clearly indicate the nature of the presentation (maximum 15 words). Only capitalise the first letter of the title and any proper nouns. Avoid abbreviations and acronyms. The title will be used for publication in the program.	The title should be as brief as possible but long enough to clearly indicate the nature of the Ignite (maximum 15 words). Only capitalise the first letter of the title and any proper nouns. Avoid abbreviations and acronyms. The title will be used for publication in the program.
Abstract	Maximum 300 words Presentation abstracts are a summary of the content of your presentation and will appear in the conference online program. Abstracts should be written in a concise and appealing way that provides a 'pitch' for why people should come to your presentation. Your abstract should clearly: • Explain what your topic is. • Explain the objective of the presentation and the importance of the topic. • Outline the core argument and the key (e.g. three) points or messages that will be shared in the presentation. • Outline the design of the presentation to meet the objectives of the presentation type. • Describe how you will promote interactivity and engagement with participants. When completing the online form you will also be asked to identify your target audience (foundational, intermediate, advanced, with the ability to select up to 2 audiences).	Maximum 100 words Abstracts for Ignite presentations only need to describe the topic and up to 3 key points that will be made.

Justification statement	Maximum 300 words All proposals require a justification statement. This is your opportunity to persuade reviewers that your presentation is worthy of a place on the program. Please read and address the selection criteria. The justification statement outlines: • The presentation format you have chosen (presentation, panel, workshop etc.), and why you have chosen the particular style of presentation to achieve your objective. • Why the objective of the presentation is beneficial for attendees. • The presentation's contribution to the conference theme, one or more sub-themes. • How the topic and presentation contributes to building or strengthening the field of evaluation (e.g. implications for evaluation theory and/or practice). • How you propose to interact with the audience. • Outlines the presenters' experience in facilitating presentations of this format.	Not required. Please type N/A in the field.

Assessment criteria

In preparing your proposal's Justification Statement, please ensure you address the following criteria for assessment:

Criteria A *Relevance /Importance to AES Audience*	The proposal should address topics that are of importance to a broad audience of AES members interested in discussing evaluation theory and practice and, if accepted, be likely to attract an audience.
Criteria B *Relevance /Importance to overall conference theme and to one or more of the sub-themes*	The proposal **MUST** align with the conference theme and one of the sub-themes – the relevance and contribution to the theme and sub-themes needs to be explicit and clear in the proposal. One or more sub-themes will be identified when submitting and used to stream the presentations.
Criteria C *Technical quality*	A proposal should meet high standards of technical quality in terms of methodological, conceptual and logical rigor.
Criteria D *Contribution to methods, theories, policies and practices*	Proposals presenting the results, findings, and circumstances of a specific evaluation should describe the ways in which it contributes to the broader knowledge-base or to skill building.
Criteria E *Meets presentation format*	Meets the requirements of the presentation format. For long presentations, the conference organisers strongly encourage you to detail how you will build audience interaction into your presentation.

Except for Ignite presentations, all conference abstract proposals are double-blind peer reviewed.

NOTE: No individual may present in more than three conference presentations, including as a co-presenter.

Ignite presentations have a separate review process. Presenters are asked to submit a title for their talk and a 100 word 'pitch'. The proposal will be reviewed against the criteria 'Relevance to AES audience'.

Note: The written 'pitch' does not require a justification statement.

Tips

When preparing your abstract refer to the assessment criteria.

To aid readability and comprehension please also ensure abstracts:

- Do not include acronyms, unless they are very well known internationally.
- Do not include jargon terms or words that will not be understood by many people.
- Are well written, do not have spelling or grammatical errors.

All abstracts will be edited to conform to the Australian Style Guide and Macquarie Dictionary. If you have access to those resources, please comply with the conventions. Use the Australian or UK English version of spell check.

If accepted, presenting authors may be asked to edit the abstract before inclusion in the conference program.

Supporting resources

The format will guide the structure of your proposal and presentation. Here's a short selection of resources to support you in developing your presentation.

- AEA's Potent Presentation Initiative – resources to support conference presentation messaging, design and delivery
- P21 Messaging Model handout. If following this, short papers of 20 minutes would be structured as: background (1 minute), bottom line (4 minutes), explanation (10 minutes), so what? (3 minutes), call to action (2 minutes). Double time estimates for long papers of 40 minutes.
- How to plan a lively panel discussion
- Best practices for engaging and dynamic sessions
- What are panel discussions and how to plan them effectively?
- Liz Smith's tips on Ignite presentations
- Giving Ignite presentations
- How to give a great Ignite talk

Submit your proposal here