



CWLA's 2026 National Conference

The Work Ahead: Practice, Policy, and Possibility

We are in a moment of profound transformation.

Across the country, communities are feeling the impact of shifting federal priorities and uncertain funding. The programs that support families—including health care, food assistance, and housing—are under strain. This has deep implications for children, youth, parents, families and the organizations that serve them—not just in child welfare, but across every entity that touches their lives. Yet even in this environment of uncertainty, opportunity exists—if we are ready to act with clarity, courage, and vision.

The central theme guiding next year's conference is: what's next? The question is no longer whether the child welfare system should change, but how—and what we will choose to build in its place? What must we discard, and what must we preserve? How do we design a system that truly affords children and families the support and freedom to flourish within their communities? How do we fight for what's right without losing hope or momentum?

We know that not everything needs to be reinvented. Across the country, people are doing good work—innovating, protecting, strengthening families, and partnering with communities. This year's conference is about lifting up what works and asking how we carry that work forward in new and more sustainable ways. **It's about preparing for change, envisioning the future, and being bold enough to lead it.**

We are calling on advocates, practitioners, policymakers, researchers, and community leaders to submit workshop proposals that help move the field forward—grounded in values and principles, focused on action and practical strategies, and driven by hope. We are seeking proposals that speak to systemic design, effective practice, equitable policy, and workforce support in a time of change. Whether your work is direct service, policy reform, or cross-system collaboration, we want your voice in this conversation. This is not a time for resignation. It's a time for resolve. CWLA's 2026 Conference will be a space for those ready to stand, build, and prevail. Join us in shaping what's next.

CWLA is now accepting proposal submissions for our 2026 National Conference, *The Work Ahead: Practice, Policy, and Possibility*, which will be held April 20-22, 2026, at the Crystal Gateway Marriott in Arlington, VA.

CWLA is seeking workshop presentations (75-minutes or 90-minutes in length) that feature evidence-informed and evidence-based programs, practices, and strategies that drive significant progress in the well-being of children and families.

Presentation topic areas include:

Policy Approaches and System Partnerships

- Federal and state-level policy approaches that have preserved or expanded access to basic needs, child abuse and neglect prevention and intervention services, and health care services
- Lessons learned from the implementation of the Families First Prevention Services Act
- Partnerships across systems, states/counties, and within communities that have successfully eradicated barriers to support and enhanced child and family well-being

Organizational Capacity and Strategic Operations

- Creative business and operational strategies for overcoming funding and budgetary challenges, including aligning organizational strengths with strategic funding opportunities
- Successful applications of research, evaluation, data, and CQI in programs and organizations
- Innovative approaches to service delivery, particularly with strategies and lessons that speak directly to and can be implemented by frontline staff members
- Effective methods of recruiting and supporting a robust workforce, including skill building for supervisors/leadership development, and addressing secondary trauma, moral injury, and compassion fatigue, including for resource parents and parent advocates

Equity, Inclusion, and Population-Specific Practice

- Successful strategies to understand and promote equity, cultural humility, and strong racial, cultural, and ethnic identity
- Efforts to improve services for specific populations, including immigrants, LGBTQ+ children and resource parents, Latino families, and families in rural areas
- Strategies to support children and parents with disabilities, including efforts to ensure equitable access to services and supports

Health, Mental Health, and Community Safety

- Strategies for supporting children and families impacted by mental health or substance misuse, including residential treatment placements
- Successful efforts to expand access to mental health treatment for children, adolescents, and youth through Medicaid and other health systems

- Strategies to address the impact of increased exposure, or likelihood of exposure, to gun violence on child and adolescent populations

Family-Centered Services

- Efforts to rethink front-end services, including working differently with parents, families, and communities and improving the use of mandated reporters
- Effective strategies and practices that strengthen families, including:
 - o Prevention of and interventions for children coming into care
 - o Strategies for permanency, including reunification, kinship care, guardianship, and adoption
 - o Post-adoption supports and services
 - o Engaging resource parents and kinship caregivers in supporting children and their birth parents
 - o Addressing poverty and other social determinants of health, including responding to the concrete needs of children and families

Selection Criteria:

- Alignment with the topic areas
- Innovation and originality, including approaches from other systems that can be used in child welfare
- Ability to be replicated and adapted within other communities, systems, and practice areas
- Demonstrated leadership in advancing effective strategies, programs, and practices
- Engaging format, including budgeted time for facilitated conversation, breakout groups, activities, and use of handouts
- Preference will be given for proposals that include the voices of youth and families with lived expertise or community partners as presenters or co-presenters
- Priority will be given to CWLA members

Requirements:

CWLA's will choose presentations using the selection criteria while ensuring a mix of speakers based on practice area, geography, and experience.

Selected presenters must agree to provide an electronic copy of any presentation materials and handouts no later than two weeks before the conference. Each workshop will receive 2 discounted presenter tickets. If a workshop has more than 2 presenters, additional presenters must register at the full rate.

The submission deadline is Friday, August 1, 2025.

Form questions

Are you or your agency a member of CWLA?

Please list the proposed title for your conference presentation in 15 words or less. *(Be sure to use person-first language and clearly identify the topic area)*

Please provide a summary of your presentation in 125 words or less. This description will be used in the Conference Program and read by conference attendees. *(Be sure to use person-first language)*

Please provide an in-depth description of your presentation in 200 words or less, including objectives and proposed handouts. This description will be read by CWLA staff.

CWLA recommends a maximum of 3 presenters per workshop due to room and time constraints. Please list the following for all presenters:

- Full name
- Organization
- Title
- City
- State
- Email address
- Short bio

Please indicate the target audience for your presentation. (Select all that apply)

- Front line workers
- Supervisors
- CEOs / Agency Directors / Commissioners
- Resource parents
- Board members
- Other

How will your workshop format engage attendees and encourage audience participation?

What actionable strategies from your presentation can attendees take back to their communities?

Please detail how your session is centered around evidence-informed practices and/or supported by research.

Please detail how your material includes input from people with lived expertise.

Have you presented at a CWLA conference in the past three years?

Have you presented on a similar topic at any other national, regional, or state conferences in the past three years? If yes, please detail where and when you presented on a similar topic.