

AFOP NATIONAL CONFERENCE DENVER, COLORADO

SEPTEMBER 22 - 24, 2026



 **From the Fields to *Futures*:**
Cultivating Leaders and Empowering
Farmworker Communities

 **Del Campo al *Futura*:**
Cultivando líderes y fortaleciendo a las
comunidades de trabajadores agrícolas

 **REGISTRATION
NOW OPEN!**
EARLY BIRD RATES END AUGUST 14, 2026

<https://afop.org/national-conference/>

AFOP 2026 NATIONAL CONFERENCE AGENDA

**Subject to change*

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2026

9:00am – 4:00pm	REGISTRATION OPEN	Colorado Foyer
10:00am – 12:00pm	AFOP Board of Directors Engagement Exercise: Getting to Know Your Fellow AFOP Leaders	Mt. Sopris
1:00pm – 5:00pm	AFOP Board of Directors Meeting	Mt. Sopris

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2026

8:00am – 4:00pm	REGISTRATION OPEN	Colorado Foyer	
7:45am - 9:00am	BREAKFAST BUFFET	Aspen Ballroom	
9:00am – 10:15am	OPENING PLENARY SESSION Ernesto Mejia, CoolSpeak	Aspen Ballroom	
10:30am – 11:30am	<p>Global: Farm Labor Outlook 2026-2027</p> <p><i>Speaker:</i> Philip Martin, Ph. D., Professor Emeritus, UC Davis</p>	U.S. agriculture depends on approximately 2.5 million farmworkers each year. This session examines the impacts of recent immigration enforcement trends, evolving H-2A policies, and emerging state responses to agricultural wage requirements.	Maroon
10:30am – 11:30am	<p>Employment & Training: Beyond Motivation: Building Connections That Prepare Young People for the Workforce</p> <p><i>Speaker:</i> Ernesto Mejia, CoolSpeak</p>	Motivation isn't something we give; it's something we unlock through relevance and belonging. Learn to create meaningful relationships with today's youth and create experiences that build confidence, purpose, and workforce readiness.	Colorado A
10:30am – 11:30am	<p>Senior Staff: Taking Sector Strategies to the Next Level</p> <p><i>Speaker:</i> TBD</p>	We talk a lot about sector strategies, but are we using them effectively? Join this session to share experiences, learn from your peers, and explore new ideas for helping farmworkers succeed in high-demand industries.	Mt. Sopris

10:30am – 11:30am		Housing: Best Practices <i>Speaker:</i> TBD	Quality housing services can be life-changing for farmworkers and their families. Explore best practices for assessing needs, navigating resources, overcoming barriers, and delivering housing assistance that promotes stability and long-term success.	Mt. Columbia
11:45am – 12:45pm	BREAKOUT B	Employment & Training: From Assessment to Action: Building Individual Education Plans <i>Speaker:</i> Teresa Mendez, Statewide Director of Operations, PPEP, Inc.	Learn how to translate participant assessments into clear, actionable Individual Education Plans that reflect available local training options. This session focuses on setting goals and aligning services and training pathways to support participant progress and long-term success.	Colorado A
11:45am – 12:45pm		Senior Staff: Incorporating Principles from the Co-enrollment Guide into Your Programs <i>Speaker:</i> Laura Ibañez, Unit Chief, Specialty National Programs, U.S. Department of Labor	USDOL released the new co-enrollment guide for ETA grantees in April 2026, and it has already changed the way NFJP grantees do business. Come get the latest policy pointers from USDOL to make sure you are on the right track!	Mt. Sopris
11:45am – 12:45pm		Housing: Deepening Our Knowledge of Agricultural Worker Housing <i>Speaker:</i> Manda LaPorte, Research Associate, Housing Assistance Council (HAC)	Explore findings from HAC’s updated national farmworker housing study, including current conditions, key trends, policy impacts, and barriers affecting housing access for agricultural workers.	Mt. Columbia
12:45pm – 2:15pm		Lunch on Your Own		
2:15pm – 3:15pm	BREAKOUT C	ATI ONLY: Enhanced Empowerment Tools for Your Clients <i>Speaker:</i> Darrell Andrews, Workforce Development Consultant & Motivator, Darrell Andrews & Associates LLC	Explore practical tools and strategies that help participants build confidence, strengthen decision-making skills, and overcome barriers to success. <i>For 2025-2026 Case Management ATI participants only.</i>	Colorado B
2:15pm – 3:15pm		Employment & Training: Reframing Client Potential: Strength-Based Career Advising for Individuals <i>Speaker:</i> Javier Morales, Founder, Alabama Non-Profit Housing	Shift from a deficit-focused to strengths-based approach in workforce and education services by recognizing clients’ lived experience and informal skills, building trust, increasing motivation, and creating pathways to long-term success.	Colorado A
2:15pm – 3:15pm		Senior Staff: Keeping the Spark Alive: Supporting Team Morale and Preventing Burnout <i>Speaker:</i> Jeanne McKenna, Director of Workforce Development and Education, and Gloria Miller, Program Manager, Black Hills Special Services Cooperative	Discover how to energize your team, boost morale, and prevent burnout through meaningful connection, recognition, and support. Gain practical tools to cultivate a thriving workplace culture.	Mt. Sopris B
2:15pm – 3:15pm		Housing: Reporting into GPMS (DOL) <i>Speaker:</i> USDOL, tentative	Gain a clear understanding of GPMS reporting requirements for National Farmworker Jobs Program Housing grantees. This session will walk participants through key reporting processes, common challenges, data quality best practices, and tips for ensuring accurate, timely submissions.	Mt. Sopris A

3:30pm – 4:30pm	BREAKOUT D	ATI ONLY: Taking Your Leadership to the Next Level <i>Speaker:</i> Darrell Andrews, Workforce Development Consultant & Motivator, Darrell Andrews & Associates LLC	You learned and grew so much as leaders this past year – now it’s time to put those lessons into action! <i>2025-2026 Motivational Leadership ATI participants only.</i>	Colorado B
3:30pm – 4:30pm		Global: Project Protect Promotoras <i>Speaker:</i> Betty Velasquez, Regional Director for the Southeast Region of the Project Protect Promotora Network (PPPN)	Learn how Colorado’s Project Protect Promotora Network has leveraged trusted community leadership, technology, and training to connect agricultural workers with critical resources, advance equity, and improve health and economic outcomes.	Maroon
3:30pm – 4:30pm		Employment & Training: Introduction to Eligibility Rules for the National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP) <i>Speaker:</i> Sandy Adams, Statewide Director of Compliance, PPEP, Inc.	Build a strong foundation in NFJP eligibility requirements. This session will provide an overview of key eligibility criteria, documentation standards, and common compliance considerations to help staff confidently determine participant eligibility and ensure program integrity.	Colorado A
3:30pm – 4:30pm		Senior Staff: NFJP Updates: What’s Changed and What You Need to Know <i>Speaker:</i> Laura Ibañez, Unit Chief, Specialty National Programs, U.S. Department of Labor	Even for those familiar with NFJP, the program continues to evolve rapidly. Join this session for a concise update on key changes over the past year and the critical adjustments programs should make to stay current and compliant.	Mt. Sopris
5:00pm – 6:00pm	ATI CERTIFICATION CEREMONY (all invited)			Aspen Ballroom
EVENING ON YOUR OWN				

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2026

8:00am – 4:00pm	REGISTRATION OPEN			Colorado Foyer
7:45am-9:00am	Coffee Service Breakfast on Your Own			Colorado Foyer
9:00am – 10:15am	PLENARY SESSION: -- Speaker: Jerry Ballistreri, Reading the Tells			Aspen Ballroom
10:30am – 11:30am	BREAKOUT E	Global: Projecting Confidence Through Body Language <i>Speaker:</i> Jerry Balistreri, Reading the Tells	How can you use non-verbal communication to inspire others, command respect without demanding it, and show an assured presence? Come learn the secrets to convey poise and confidence at all times. You don't get a second chance to make a first impression!	Colorado B
10:30am – 11:30am		Senior Staff: Updates on Performance for the National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP) <i>Speaker:</i> Andrew Wiegand, Ph. D., President, Social Policy Research Associates (SPRA), <i>tentative</i>	Curious how the National Farmworker Jobs Program has been performing in recent quarters? Dr. Wiegand will summarize current and recent program performance for NFJP CST and Housing grantees.	Mt. Sopris
10:30am – 11:30am		Employment & Training: Seeing the Big Picture: Performance Reporting for Frontline Staff	Learn how frontline staff contribute to meaningful performance reporting outcomes. This session connects day-to-day service delivery with key metrics, helping staff understand data collection, reporting	Colorado A

		<i>Speaker:</i> Ashley Rodriguez, Vice President of Compliance, Southeast Non-Profit Housing (SENPH)	expectations, and how their work drives program impact.	
11:45am –12:45pm	BREAKOUT F	ATI: Come and Learn What’s in Store for ATI 2026-2027 <i>Speaker:</i> Darrell Andrews, Workforce Development Consultant & Motivator, Darrell Andrews & Associates LLC	“Coach D” Darrell Andrews has shepherded over 200 AFOP staff through ATI and now he is ready for more! Come learn what’s in store for ATI in 2026-2027 and how you can benefit from this program, either as a NEW or RETURNING participant. Note: This ATI session is open to ALL AFOP conference attendees.	Colorado B
11:45am –12:45pm		Global: Change Management and Resilience During Times of Upheaval with NFJP <i>Speaker:</i> Dawn James-Valentine, Senior Training Consultant, Old Dominion University	This session helps NFJP staff respond to changes like funding shifts, policy updates, or workforce challenges. Participants will discuss practical ways to stay flexible, communicate clearly, and keep services running smoothly.	Colorado A
11:45am – 12:45pm		Employment & Training: Building Bridges That Work: Effective Outreach & Partnerships in NFJP Programs <i>Speaker:</i> Mellisa Reyes and Jesus Aviles-Diaz, PathStone Corporation	Explore practical strategies to strengthen NFJP outreach and partnerships. Learn how to engage community partners, expand program visibility, and build collaborations that enhance service delivery, increase enrollment, and support farmworker success.	Maroon
11:45am – 12:45pm		Senior Staff: Cultivating Leadership Growth: Strengthening Roots, Growing Impact <i>Speaker:</i> Michelle Engel-Silva, CEO, Proteus, Inc.	This interactive leadership training explores core leadership components—values, strategy, systems, and behaviors—while emphasizing resilience, self-reflection, eliminating ineffective habits, and developing future leaders for lasting organizational impact.	Mt. Sopris
12:45pm – 2:15pm	Luncheon Featuring Children in the Fields Campaign (CIFC) Essay and Art Award Winners			Aspen Ballroom
2:30pm – 3:15pm	Breakout G	ATI ONLY: Workforce Development Training Kick-off <i>Speaker:</i> Darrell Andrews, Workforce Development Consultant & Motivator, Darrell Andrews & Associates LLC	Kick off another full year of coaching, training, and encouragement with Coach D! This session introduces participants to the Workforce Development Training series <i>Part 2</i> , outlines expectations, and sets the stage for ongoing learning and engagement.	Colorado B
2:15pm – 3:15pm		Global: Pitch Perfect: Communicating Your Value in Seconds <i>Speaker:</i> Savannah Carreño, CEO and Founder, Please Elaborate	Introduce your organization and what you do in 20 seconds or less. Learn to succinctly pitch your work and confidently describe the value you add, without rambling. This workshop includes an exercise to practice what you learn.	Mt. Columbia
2:15pm – 3:15pm		Employment & Training: Practical Ways to Partner with your SMA and SWA <i>Facilitator:</i> Juan Regalado, former National Monitor Advocate, USDOL <i>Panelists:</i> Olga Ruiz and Claudia Cabrall, Colorado Department of Labor & Employment; Leon Ortega, Rocky Mountain SER; Joel Leiva, SER Corp Kansas	Learn practical strategies for building strong partnerships with State Monitor Advocates and State Workforce Agencies. Explore communication, referrals, joint outreach, and collaboration techniques that improve services and outcomes for farmworkers.	Colorado A

2:15pm – 3:15pm		<p>Senior Staff: Connecting Services: WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker and NFJP</p> <p><i>Speaker:</i> Heather Henry, CEO, California Human Development (CHD), and Patricia Virgen, Executive Director, San Joaquin County Employment & Economic Development Department</p>	Two experienced NFJP grantees will share practical strategies for building strong partnerships with local Workforce Development Boards, navigating WIOA challenges, improving coordination, and enhancing services for farmworkers through real-world examples and lessons learned.	Mt. Sopris
2:15pm – 3:15pm		<p>MIS: Internal Policies & Procedures for NFJP: Comparing Notes</p> <p><i>Speaker:</i> Dawn James-Valentine, Senior Training Consultant, Old Dominion University</p>	This session provides a forum for NFJP grantees to compare internal policies and procedures, share effective practices, and discuss approaches to improving consistency, compliance, and operational efficiency across programs.	Maroon
3:30pm – 4:30pm	BREAKOUT H	<p>ATI ONLY: Professional Development Training Kick-off</p> <p><i>Speaker:</i> Darrell Andrews, Workforce Development Consultant & Motivator, Darrell Andrews & Associates LLC</p>	Let's continue learning and growing as professionals! This session launches the next series in the Professional Development Training cohort with Coach D. Come for an engaging new session that will help increase your confidence and skills as a leader with NFJP.	Colorado B
3:30pm – 4:30pm		<p>Global: Don't Let the Paint Drive the Car: Using AI Without Losing Structure, Compliance, or Control</p> <p><i>Speaker:</i> Tashia Harrison, Chief Executive Officer Place of Purpose LLC</p>	Explore responsible AI use in workforce and grant programs. Learn where AI adds value, where it poses risks, and gain practical strategies to ensure compliance, data protection, and effective, ethical application.	Colorado A
3:30pm – 4:30pm		<p>Employment & Training: Effective Recruitment Strategies for Farmworker Youth</p> <p><i>Speaker:</i> Israel Delamora, Education & Career Counselor Manager, OIC of Washington</p>	Recruiting farmworker youth isn't just about enrolling participants—it's about helping them see what's possible. Learn from a seasoned recruiter whose proven approach engages not only young people, but also employers, schools, and community partners to build a strong pipeline into the National Farmworker Jobs Program.	Aspen
3:30pm – 4:30pm		<p>Senior Staff: How to Prepare for an NFJP Monitoring Review</p> <p><i>Speaker:</i> Krister Engdahl, former Federal Project Officer (FPO)</p>	Monitoring reviews don't have to be stressful. Learn how to prepare documentation, assess compliance, address common findings, and build internal processes that help ensure a smooth and successful NFJP monitoring review.	Mt. Columbia
3:30pm – 4:30pm		<p>MIS: Troubleshooting GPMS for Career Services and Training Grantees</p> <p><i>Speakers:</i> USDOL, tentative</p>	Learn practical solutions to common GPMS challenges faced by NFJP CST grantees. This session will cover troubleshooting techniques, reporting issues, data accuracy, and strategies for improving system efficiency.	Mt. Sopris
5:00pm – 6:00pm	PRESIDENT'S RECEPTION (all invited)			Colorado Foyer

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2026

8:00am – 11:00am	REGISTRATION OPEN		Colorado Foyer	
8:30am – 10:00am	BREAKOUT I	<p>Global: Great on Paper: Why Strategic Plans Fail in Real Life—and What to Do About It</p> <p><i>Speaker:</i> Tashia Harrison, CEO Place of Purpose LLC</p>	<p>This session explores practical strategies for aligning grant writing, financial compliance, and program operations. Participants will learn how to strengthen implementation, maintain audit readiness, prevent common challenges, and achieve sustainable outcomes.</p>	Maroon
8:30am – 10:00am		<p>Employment & Training: Youth Scenarios</p> <p><i>Speaker:</i> Israel Delamora, Education & Career Counselor Manager, OIC of Washington</p>	<p>Recruiting farmworker youth is only the first step. How do you keep them engaged, assess their readiness for NFJP, and prepare them for the workforce? Through interactive discussions and real-life scenarios, you'll explore practical strategies you can adapt for your own program and leave with tools you can use right away.</p>	Colorado A
8:30am – 10:00am		<p>Senior Staff: Farm Labor Law Enforcement</p> <p><i>Speaker:</i> USDOL, <i>tentative</i></p>	<p>Gain insight into labor law enforcement priorities, policy developments, and compliance trends in 2026, with a special focus on how federal enforcement activities are impacting farmworkers and agricultural employers.</p>	Mt. Sopris
8:30am – 10:00am		<p>MIS: GPMS round table</p> <p><i>Speaker:</i> Erin Zimmerman and Gloria Miller, Black Hills Special Services Cooperative (BHSSC)</p>	<p>Has GPMS caused major adjustments for your program? Please join us for a Q&A session to learn from each other. Bring your questions and your laptops if you would like.</p>	Mt. Columbia
10:30am – 12:00pm	CLOSING PLENARY BRUNCH		Aspen Ballroom	

The tracks are only a guide to help conference attendees determine which sessions relate best to their work. Participants may attend any sessions.

*[Most ATI sessions require advance registration and payment](#) – check with your supervisor.