

AFOP NATIONAL CONFERENCE DENVER, COLORADO

SEPTEMBER 22 - 24, 2026



From the Fields to *Futures*:

Cultivating Leaders and Empowering Farmworker Communities



Del Campo al *Futuro*:

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	Colorado Ballroom
9:00am – 10:15am	OPENING PLENARY SESSION Speaker Ernesto Mejia, CoolSpeak, “The Good is Still Growing”	Colorado Ballroom
10:30am – 11:30am	Global: Farm Labor Outlook 2026-2027 <i>Speaker:</i> Philip Martin, Ph. D., Professor Emeritus, UC Davis	Maroon Peak
10:30am – 11:30am	Employment & Training: Beyond Motivation: Making Connections That Prepare Young People for the Workforce <i>Speaker:</i> Ernesto Mejia, Motivational Speaker, CoolSpeak	Aspen Ballroom
10:30am – 11:30am	Senior Staff: Workforce Pell Grants – The Time is NOW <i>Speaker:</i> Lee Foley, Managing Partner, Capitol Hill Partners	Mt. Sopris

10:30am – 11:30am		Housing: Best Practices for NFJP <i>Panelists:</i> Markus Gonzalez, Deputy of Training and Employment, PathStone Corporation; Diana Sandoval-Gutierrez, Housing Program Manager, PPEP, Inc.; Frailan Sendejo, Workforce Development Manager, MET, Inc.	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. Oxford
11:45am – 12:45pm	BREAKOUT B	Global: 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 stay energized, boost your morale, and prevent burnout through meaningful connection, recognition, and support. Gain practical tools to cultivate a thriving workplace culture and maintain a positive work-life balance	Maroon Peak
11:45am – 12:45pm		Employment & Training: From Assessment to Action: Building Better Individual Employment Plans <i>Speaker:</i> Teresa Mendez, Statewide Director of Operations, PPEP, Inc.	Assessments are only valuable when they lead to a plan. Discover how to use participant assessments, career exploration, career pathways, and resources (e.g. O*NET and My Next Move) to collaboratively build better and more effective Individual Employment Plans (IEPs) that lead to participants' long-term success.	Aspen Ballroom
11:45am – 12:45pm		Senior Staff: Apprenticeship Opportunities for NFJP <i>Speaker:</i> Abigail Allen, Program Specialist, Office of Apprenticeship, U.S. Department of Labor	With federal investment in Apprenticeship programs growing, now is the time to explore how NFJP grantees can take advantage of these opportunities. This session will provide an overview of Apprenticeship models, highlight opportunities in agriculture and related industries, and discuss strategies for developing or partnering in programs that expand career pathways for farmworkers.	Mt. Columbia
11:45am – 12:45pm		Housing: Reporting into GPMS <i>Speaker:</i> Olivia Pham, Research Programmer, Social Policy Research Associates (SPRA), <i>tentative</i> <i>Facilitator:</i> Andrew Wiegand, Ph. D., President, Social Policy Research Associates (SPRA)	Come gain a clearer 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
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>Final session for the 2025-2026 Case Management course.</i>	Aspen Ballroom
2:15pm – 3:15pm		Employment and Training: Breaking Through Self-imposed Limitations to Build Your Dream Career and Life <i>Speaker:</i> Vikki Burrington, Certified Dream Builder Coach, Brave Thinking Institute	Are you ready to bridge the gap between where you are and the life you truly love living? In this interactive session, attendees will apply proven transformational success principles to the journey of farmworker communities. Participants will learn actionable strategies to gain clarity, build confidence, and identify their next level of success—whether in the field, office, or their personal lives.	Maroon Peak
2:15pm – 3:15pm		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 <i>Facilitator:</i> Dawn James-Valentine, Associate Ombudsperson and Senior Training Consultant, Old Dominion University	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
2:15pm – 3:15pm		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. Oxford
3:30pm – 4:30pm	BREAKOUT D	ATI ONLY: Taking 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>	Aspen Ballroom
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 Peak
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.	Mt. Columbia

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 <i>Facilitator:</i> Dawn James-Valentine, Associate Ombudsperson and Senior Training Consultant, Old Dominion University	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)			Colorado 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: The Honorable Ken Salazar, “Welcome to Colorado!” Speaker Jerry Ballistreri, “Reading the Tells”			Colorado Ballroom
10:30am – 11:30am	BREAKOUT E	ATI ONLY: Client Connections 2.0 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 Client Connections training, outlines expectations, and sets the stage for ongoing learning and engagement.	Maroon Peak
10:30am – 11:30am		Global: Projecting Confidence Through Body Language <i>Speaker:</i> Jerry Balistreri, Motivational Speaker, 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!	Aspen Ballroom
10:30am – 11:30am		Employment & Training: Seeing the Big Picture: Performance Reporting for Frontline Staff <i>Speaker:</i> Ashley Rodriguez, Vice President of Compliance, Southeast Non-Profit Housing (SENPH)	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 expectations, and how their work drives program impact.	Mt. Columbia
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)	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

11:45am –12:45pm	BREAKOUT F	ATI ONLY: Leadership 2.0 Kick-off <i>Speaker:</i> Darrell Andrews, Workforce Development Consultant & Motivator, Darrell Andrews & Associates LLC	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.	Maroon Peak
11:45am –12:45pm		Global: Change Management and Resilience During Times of Upheaval with NFJP <i>Speaker:</i> Dawn James-Valentine, Associate Ombudsperson, 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.	Mt. Columbia
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.	Aspen Ballroom
11:45am – 12:45pm		Senior Staff: Cultivating Leadership Growth: Strengthening Roots, Growing Impact <i>Speaker:</i> Michelle Engel-Silva, J.D., ED.D, 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			Colorado Ballroom
2:15pm – 3:15pm	BREAKOUT G	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.	Aspen Ballroom
2:15pm – 3:15pm		Senior Staff: Connecting Services: WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker and NFJP <i>Speaker:</i> Heather Henry, CEO, California Human Development (CHD), and Patricia Virgen, Executive Director, San Joaquin County Employment & Economic Development Department	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		MIS: Internal Policies & Procedures for NFJP: Comparing Notes <i>Speaker:</i> Dawn James-Valentine, Associate Ombudsperson and Senior Training Consultant, Old Dominion University	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.	Mt. Oxford
3:30pm – 4:30pm	BREAKOUT H	Global: Don't Let the Paint Drive the Car: Using AI Without Losing Structure, Compliance, or Control <i>Speaker:</i> Tashia Harrison, Chief Executive Officer, Place of Purpose LLC	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.	Mt. Columbia
3:30pm – 4:30pm		Employment & Training: Effective Recruitment Strategies for Farmworker Youth <i>Speaker:</i> Israel Delamora, Education & Career Counselor Manager, OIC of Washington	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 Ballroom
3:30pm – 4:30pm		Senior Staff: How to Prepare for an NFJP Monitoring Review <i>Speaker:</i> Krister Engdahl, former Federal Project Officer (FPO), U.S. Department of Labor	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.	Maroon Peak
3:30pm – 4:30pm		MIS: Troubleshooting GPMS for Career Services and Training Grantees <i>Speakers:</i> Olivia Pham, Research Programmer, Social Policy Research Associates (SPRA) <i>Facilitator:</i> Andrew Wiegand, Ph. D., President, Social Policy Research Associates (SPRA)	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 <i>(all invited)</i>			Colorado Foyer

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2026

8:00am – 11:00am	REGISTRATION OPEN			Colorado Foyer
8:30am – 10:00am	BREAKOUT I	Global: Great on Paper: Why Strategic Plans Fail in Real Life—and What to Do About It <i>Speaker:</i> Tashia Harrison, CEO, Place of Purpose LLC	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.	Mt. Columbia
8:30am – 10:00am		Employment & Training: Engaging Youth for Success <i>Speaker:</i> Israel Delamora, Education & Career Counselor Manager, OIC of Washington	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.	Aspen Ballroom
8:30am – 10:00am		Senior Staff: Farm Labor Law Updates <i>Speaker:</i> Jennifer Lee, Senior Policy Advisor, Wage and Hour Division, U.S. Department of Labor	Hear an update on labor law developments affecting the agricultural workforce, including recent legal and regulatory changes, compliance considerations, and practical takeaways for agricultural employers and workforce professionals.	Mt. Sopris
8:30am – 10:00am		MIS: GPMS Round Table <i>Speaker:</i> Ashley Rodriguez, Vice President of Compliance, Southeast Non-Profit Housing (SENP)	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.	Mt. Oxford
10:30am – 12:00pm	CLOSING PLENARY BRUNCH			Colorado 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.