Guidelines on Submitting a Session Proposal

Introduction

The National Water Quality Monitoring Council (NWQMC) was established in 1997 as the successor to the Intergovernmental Task Force on Monitoring Water Quality. The overall purpose of the NWQMC is to champion and support water quality information to inform natural resources management and environmental protection. The Council is a nationwide partnership of water monitoring and information management organizations from federal, state and Tribal agencies, municipalities, business and industry, academia, agriculture, environmental groups, volunteer scientists and others with expertise in environmental monitoring. The NWQMC is charged with fostering dialogue and encouraging collaboration for the collection, management, and use of water quality data and information needed to assess status and trends; to identify and prioritize existing and emerging problems; to identify research needs; to develop and implement management, stewardship and regulatory programs; and to evaluate compliance with environmental requirements and the effectiveness of programs and projects. More information on the NWQMC can be found on the EPA's NWQMC website.

Since its establishment, the NWQMC has been hosting bi-annual conferences around the country as one of the ways to accomplish the goals of the Council. For 2027, the NWQMC is hosting a Virtual Gathering, an exciting opportunity to connect with your colleagues and peers in the water monitoring community in new ways. The goal is for participants to network, develop new skills, build partnerships, and exchange information in anticipation of the **15th National Monitoring Conference** to be held in spring 2028! Location to be determined.

The Program Committee, a group of volunteers that help plan and organize the Virtual Gathering, will communicate with you regularly throughout the Virtual Gathering planning process. In consultation with the session Champions, the Program Committee will set up the final program.

Overview

This document provides information for session Champions on their responsibilities throughout the Virtual Gathering process, details on the organization of the Virtual Gathering, and the role of the Program Committee in working with session Champions.

If this is your first time submitting a proposal to a conference hosted by the NWQMC, we always welcome new contributors and participants.

As you develop your session, we highly encourage you to include presenters, speakers, and panelists from a range of perspectives and organizational affiliations — such as federal, state, Tribal, and local water professionals; nonprofits; academia; water consultants and industry; and volunteer and community scientists.

Important links

~~To submit a session proposal: Session Proposal Submission Form~~ *closed*

For all information on the 2027 Virtual Gathering: 2027 Virtual Gathering Website

Important Dates



~~**October 9th, 2026**~~ **Extended to October 23rd, 2026** - Session proposals due. *closed*

~~**November 6th, 2026**~~ **Extended to November 20th, 2026** - Champions will be notified by the Program Committee about session acceptance and will be provided with follow-up information at this time. Session proposals will be evaluated according to the 2027 NWQMC Virtual Gathering themes and their alignment with the wide range of attendee interest.

Mid-December 2026 **Extended to early January 2027** – Champions will be contacted and asked to provide detailed session information to the Program Committee. At this time, the session should be fully formed. A fully formed session will include contact information for the confirmed speakers, Moderator, and co-Champion; the order in which presentations will occur in the session; and final presentation abstracts (if applicable to your type of session).

Champions

As a **Champion** of a session that is selected as part of the content of the 2027 Virtual Gathering, you will be responsible for the session from start to finish, including proposing, organizing, and facilitating it. This includes but is not limited to selecting presenters and coordinating with them before and during the Virtual Gathering; as well as working with the Program Committee and Logistics Staff during the planning process to ensure that the session is well formed. As a session Champion, you will be considered the point of contact for the session.

The Program Committee encourages the designation of a Co-Champion (or two) to help with session organization. You will coordinate with Co-Champions/moderators before and during the Virtual Gathering.

The Program Committee will offer a few mandatory trainings prior to the Virtual Gathering for Champions, co-Champions, and Moderators to ensure you are familiar with the virtual platform. In addition, there will be Technical Experts assigned to your session during the Virtual Gathering to manage the technology and troubleshoot any potential issues that may arise. More information about this will be provided in early 2027.

Moderators

We encourage the session Champion or Co-Champion(s) to also serve as the session Moderator during the Virtual Gathering. The role of a session Moderator is to give a short introduction at the start of the session, champion the session according to the general guidelines (provided prior to the Virtual Gathering), provide a thank you to the presenters/attendees, and mention additional recorded presentations, as well as related topical sessions and posters available that are part of the Virtual Gathering.

In the event you are not able to moderate (e.g., you are also a presenter in the session) the Program Committee may facilitate the identification of individuals that can serve as session Moderator(s).

Session Types

We are requesting proposals for 4 types of Sessions for the 2027 Virtual Gathering:

Concurrent Presentations: Live 90-minute blocks of four 20-minute presentations, all related to a similar *Hot Topic* in the water monitoring world. Ideally, presenters will represent a mix of affiliations and perspectives.

> Each 20-minute speaking slot consists of 15 minutes for the presentation and 5 minutes for introductions and questions. At the end of each session, 10 minutes are reserved for general session questions.

Roundtable/Panel Discussions: Live 90-minute blocks typically consisting of short presentation(s) followed by a facilitated discussion and Q&A. Content may be provided in advance to attendees.

> **Roundtable Discussions** give attendees an interactive opportunity to discuss and provide insights on an important topic. Attendees should contribute their expertise and experiences with a challenging topic that requires input to develop solutions. They are typically comprised of a single 15-minute presentation (roughly), with the remaining time reserved for facilitated discussion.
>
> **Panel Discussions** bring together subject matter experts in a short presentation format followed by a facilitated discussion where attendees can explore topics in more detail. Attendees should come away with a more complete understanding of the topic, as well as associated challenges and opportunities. They are typically 4–6 individual lightning presentations followed by a facilitated discussion and Q&A.

Lightning/Poster Talks: Live 30-minute blocks of three, 7-minute lightning or poster talks, followed by facilitated Q&A.

> This format allows for fast-paced presentations providing an overview of a project or study, focused on the most important takeaways. Talks are grouped under a shared theme or topic, offering diverse perspectives to spark future conversations and collaboration.

Workshops/Short Courses: Interactive training opportunities for attendees, typically 90 minutes long.

> Workshops/Short Courses provide an interactive, hands-on training opportunity for attendees. The focus should be on the latest field, analytical or data analysis techniques related to the Virtual Gathering themes and topics. Attendees should walk away with an introduction to a new skill set.

Content Viewing Formats

The 2027 Virtual Gathering will be in a **100% virtual format**. While our planning is still ongoing, our intention is to provide the following elements for attendees:

- **Live-Streamed** – All content of the agenda will be streamed live during the Virtual Gathering. In addition, virtual attendees can communicate with presenters through the virtual platform by asking questions and participating in discussions.

- **Pre-recorded Asynchronous Presentations** – Asynchronous presentations are pre-recorded presentations approved by the Program Committee that can be uploaded to

the virtual platform and viewed asynchronously (i.e., not set for a specific time slot during the Virtual Gathering), along with other materials such as PowerPoint slides, references, articles and PDFs. These presentations will be available for roughly 3 months after the Virtual Gathering.

- Regardless of a presentation being part of a session during the live Virtual Gathering, we *highly* encourage all presenters to pre-record their presentation. Benefits include practicing your presentation before the live Virtual Gathering to ensure a smooth delivery; having a backup version of your presentation in case technology fails; and it is a way to ensure your presentation can be viewed by all interested attendees, such as those that may have a scheduling conflict during the live Virtual Gathering.

- Asynchronous presentations are also an option for those who cannot attend the live Virtual Gathering, as an alternative if a session does not fit in the live agenda, or if presenters in a session prefer not to present live.

- Session Champions may also choose to offer their session asynchronously instead of live during the Virtual Gathering, if they prefer.

- **Recorded Sessions** – All efforts will be made to record all sessions given during the live agenda for viewing after the Virtual Gathering via the virtual platform for all registered attendees (with presenter and session Champion permission). These recordings will be available for roughly 3 months after the Virtual Gathering.

Other Webinar Opportunities

The total time allowed for a session is typically 90 minutes. If you feel you need additional time, your session may not be able to be offered during the live Virtual Gathering due to the limited space in the agenda. However, the Program Committee would be happy to work with you to come up with other potential options. For example, the 90-minute time slot during the Virtual Gathering could serve as an introduction to your workshop, and a longer follow-up workshop could be held outside of the Virtual Gathering.

If a session has high attendance during the live Virtual Gathering, the Program Committee may reach out to invite the presenters of your session to provide a virtual webinar after the Virtual Gathering, (e.g., during a NWQMC meeting or a meeting for Regional Monitoring Coordinators).

Merging/Canceling Sessions

All finalized sessions proposed by the Session Champion will be reviewed by the Program Committee. The Program Committee and Logistics Staff will set up the session scheduling in the final program. If two session proposals are similar, the Program Committee may merge proposed sessions that have similar topics. If session proposals are merged, the Champion(s) from the original sessions will be asked to moderate the merged session.

Registration

Unfortunately, the NWQMC is unable to pay registration costs for presenters. Session Champions, presenters and Moderators MUST REGISTER for the Virtual Gathering and pay the associated fees. Presenters who fail to register will be removed from the agenda. More information for registration will be provided via email and on the NWQMC website at a later date.

Scholarships

If you are concerned about costs of registration, there are limited scholarship funds for members of the volunteer monitoring community. Additional information will be available on the Virtual Gathering website at a later date.

Virtual Exhibition

Commercial session proposals will not be accepted as part of the agenda. However, the Program Committee welcomes the participation of vendors, suppliers, and service providers as part of our Virtual Exhibition. More information about becoming an exhibitor will be provided via email and on the Virtual Gathering website at a later date.

Contact Information

Questions? Contact the 2027 Co-Chairs: Lilly Edmond, edmond.lillian@epa.gov, Candice Hopkins, chopkins@usgs.gov and Felipe Arzayus, felipe.arzayus@noaa.gov.