



IMAGINING AMERICA
artists + scholars in public life

IA National Gathering

Tides of Transition: Restoring Collective Spirit in Troubled Times

October 23 – 25, 2026
Davis, California

Artwork by Angelica Saucedo, who is affiliated with Taller Arte Nuevo del Amanecer (TANA), the official artists for the 2026 IA National Gathering.

2026 Imagining America National Gathering

In partnership with **University of California, Davis** and a local Steering Committee, Imagining America (IA) invites participants to gather in Davis, California for the 2026 IA National Gathering on **October 23-25, 2026**.



Visit [imaginingamerica.org](https://www.imaginingamerica.org)

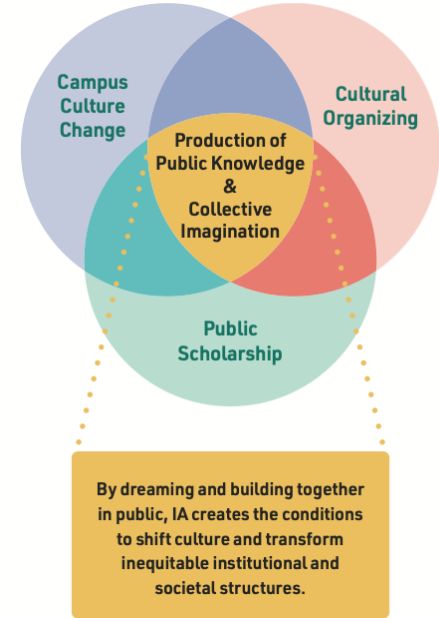
Now: View the full call for proposals, sign up for Whova, and link to online submission form

In the coming months:
Registration, travel, and hotel information, Program at-a-Glance

2026 Imagining America National Gathering

Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life (IA) brings together scholars, artists, designers, humanists, and organizers to imagine, study, and enact a more just and liberatory 'America' and world. Working across institutional, disciplinary, and community divides, IA strengthens and promotes public scholarship, cultural organizing, and campus change that inspires collective imagination, knowledge-making, and civic action on pressing public issues.

The **IA National Gathering** is an annual convening of more than 500 public scholars, artists, designers, teachers, students, and cultural organizers who are addressing the most pressing issues of our time. Gatherings offer participants a three-day immersive experience in which to connect, dialogue, learn, and strategize on the ways in which the arts, humanities, and design are and may be leveraged locally, regionally, and nationally towards transformative action.



Call for Participation

Tides of Transition: Restoring Collective Spirit in Troubled Times

Reflecting on the importance of transitions – from political crises to global climate change, and personal identity to organizational transformation – this call for participation invites proposals that share stories, research, creative works, and community practices exploring the complex process of transitioning away from systems of fear and domination and towards restoring collective spirit.

Tides of Transition calls us to re-story and honor the places, knowledges, relationships, and ecologies that have been made broken through centuries of violence and abandonment, and the current intensifying fear and repression. We know that our communities are tired, and we know that being together revives our collective spirit, giving us the strength and inspiration we need in troubled times. In this moment of upheaval, the 2026 IA National Gathering draws participants to Davis, CA in the spirit of mending the roots of our connections, and to “awaken,” as Buddhist monk and activist Thích Nhất Hạnh teaches, “from the illusion of our separateness.”

Proposals due Tuesday June 30, 2026.

On Transitions

Transitions mark and name processes of change experienced individually, such as gender, career, or life and death transitions, and collectively during shifts in economic, ecological, political, and global systems. Transitions are experienced dynamically and cyclically; they ebb and flow like the tides, constantly changing and yet always returning. It is hard to see the end of a transition from the beginning or in the middle, and often this requires that we let go of control over perfect outcomes. Transitions invite us to embrace the unknown and accept that we will be changed in the process, while keeping a keen eye on how we organize that emergent change together.

The 2026 IA National Gathering also marks a transition within Imagining America, as this occasion is the last gathering organized by the IA-UC Davis team before IA moves to a new home campus in July 2027 (host announcement in summer 2026). At this moment in a natural cycle of transition for IA, we will celebrate the good work we have done together over the past decade and join the new host in dreaming up the exciting possibilities to come.

The Yolo BioRegion

In refusing and retreating from the extractive and violent imaginary that has birthed the dominant US political and social world, what other ways of being, thinking, and doing are we turning towards in our work and communities to restore collective spirit?

Here in the region surrounding UC Davis, we feed our critical imaginations with a transition towards restored tule marshes in the Sacramento Delta, with cultural fires in grasslands, with salmon-rich waters no longer dammed, and through agricultural harvests that nourish us. Critically, how might we learn to live, love, and thrive in landscapes that might be beyond full repair? For Wintun/Maidu culture-bearer Diana Almendariz, who has been working to restore the lost wetlands in the Yolo bioregion where UC Davis is located, restoration is an impossibility given the levels of extraction that this epicenter of the gold rush, gravel rush, and industrial agriculture has seen in the last two centuries. She asks: how might we come together as allies to acknowledge past harms, and forge new futures by weaving together knowledges and traditions, old and new, for collective thriving?

Questions for Inspiration

Tides of Transition: Restoring Collective Spirit in Troubled Times seeks your stories of transition – the generative beginnings full of possibility, or the mucky middles where it is difficult to know what the future holds, or the places of arrival that are born of great collective change. This call for participation invites examples of critical imagination, collective care, intergenerational knowledges, creative practice and action, or other activities that demonstrate how the enduring spirit of the expansive Imagining America community (students, artists, educators, organizers and leaders, cultural workers, scholars) thrives through transition.

- What is the role of imagination during transitions?
- What are the practices of restoring collective spirit, and providing collective nourishment during times of uncertainty?
- How might personal transitions connect to and inspire collective action? And vice versa?
- How do the methodologies of the arts, humanities, and design create possibilities for connection through transitions?
- What historical examples provide inspiration for ways of being together in the mucky middle of transitions?
- What stories, research, and creative works demonstrate the tidal qualities of transitions?
- What other ways of being, thinking, and doing are we turning towards in our work and communities to restore collective spirit?
- Through ecological and political transitions, how might we come together as allies to acknowledge past harms, and forge new collective futures?

Preparing Your Proposal

When preparing your submission, the 2026 Gathering organizers invite you to propose an interactive session in one of the following **formats**:

Share a Presentation About Your Research, Practice, or Artistic Work (5-15 minutes)

- **Lightning Talks** (5 minutes)
- **Projects & Practices Presentation** (15 minutes)

Lead an Interactive Discussion, Workshop or Performance Presentation (75 minutes)

- **Participatory Workshop** (75 minutes)

Do Something Different! (ongoing)

- **Creative Works**

The 2026 IA National Gathering takes place from Friday October 23 - Sunday, October 25. If your proposal is accepted, please be prepared to present on any of these three days.

Session Format: Lightning Talk (5 mins)

- In this brief presentation, a single speaker will share current or past work, creative outputs, media, artistic practice, or community projects.
- Six lightning talks will be scheduled in each 75 minute session.
- You may submit an individual 5-minute talk proposal, or a group proposal with up to six lightning talk speakers for the entire 75-minute session.
- Each speakers will have **five minutes to present**, and the opportunity to integrate shared concepts of their talks into the group discussion that follows.
- **Everyone is welcomed** and encouraged to share in this format as it relates to the gathering theme.
- Speakers may choose to use a visual guide (i.e. poster, powerpoint presentation, video or audio clip), but it is not required.



Session Format: Projects & Practices Presentation (15 mins)

- In this presentation, groups or individuals will share compelling outcomes, lessons learned, methods, or collective change that emerged from community-based projects centering the arts, performance, design, cultural organizing, and/or humanities practices.

- When submitting your proposal, you must **pre-select two themes** that best apply:

- 1) creative community arts,
- 2) public engaged scholarship,
- 3) cultural organizing,
- 5) transitions,
- 6) practices of collective spirit.



- In each 75 minute session organized by theme, three presenting groups will give 15 minute presentations with the remaining time for shared discussion.

Session Format: Participatory Workshop (75 mins)

- Facilitators set an agenda and organize participant activities over 75 minutes.
- The session can focus on specific skill development, artistic or creative practice, participatory performances and movement, guided collective activity, or facilitate an interactive dialogue around a pressing issue or action.
- Workshops must be **highly interactive, collaborative**, and provide opportunities for **group co-creation**.



Session Format: Creative Works (ongoing)

- Creative, alternative proposals for **visual and/or material work, or collective art-making activities** that are ongoing (not limited to a single session).
- Creative works will be **set up in shared gathering spaces**, such as the IA registration hub, or a reflective room and may include self-directed instructions for participants or be staffed.
- If selected for inclusion in the IA National Gathering, IA staff will reach out for specific set up needs.



How to Submit Your Proposal

The submission deadline is

Tuesday, June 30, 2026 at 11:59 PM PT.

Each proposal requires the following information:

1. **Session Organizer(s) Information**
2. **Session Format**
3. **Session Title**
4. **Session Description** (350 words)
5. **Session Contribution to IA and the IA National Gathering Theme** (200 words)
6. **Session Goals** (200 words)

How to Submit Your Proposal

This year, IA will be accepting proposal submissions through Whova. Click the button below to enter the Whova portal, and then click on 'Start Proposal'. You will be prompted to login using an existing account, or to create a new account, in order to access the submission form. Whova is the official app for the 2026 IA National Gathering, and important information will be shared through this channel.

[The deadline for submissions is Tuesday, June 30, 2026 at 11:59 PM PT.](#)

Submit Your Proposal via Whova

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Describe the activities that will take place during the session. Provide context for what you will do or work that you will share. Explain the nature of any collaborations (*we encourage intergenerational, multi-organizational, and collective sessions*).

Be sure to give enough information so that reviewers can understand what the session is about and what participants may experience/learn from attending the session.

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Share specifically how this session contributes to the work of Imagining America and/or the Gathering's focus on *Tides of Transition: Restoring Collective Spirit in Troubled Times*.

Contributions to the work of Imagining America should reflect the mission, history, and values of IA (see imaginingamerica.org/who-we-are/we-believe) or connect with ongoing projects within the IA network.

Contributions to the Gathering's focus on transitions should articulate how the session will deepen participants' understanding of the theme.

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With as much detail as possible, share specifically what participants will learn and do during the session.

Please identify tools, outcomes, or resources that participants will carry into the world from your session.

Reviewers will be interested to hear how participants will benefit and learn from attending your session.

What Happens Next?

- ❑ Proposals will be **accepted through June 30, via the Whova portal.**
- ❑ In July, submissions will be reviewed by members of the 2026 IA National Gathering Steering Committee.
- ❑ In late-July or early August, you will receive a notification about the status of your proposal (accepted or not).
- ❑ All attendees, **including presenters**, must register for the IA National Gathering. Registration will open in June 2026.
- ❑ If accepted, you will submit a final title and description, confirm all co-presenters, and communicate any technology or space needs by mid-August.
- ❑ The IA National Gathering program, travel and lodging details, and FAQs will be updated on imaginingamerica.org/what-we-do/national-gathering/ as information becomes available.
- ❑ Attend the 2026 IA National Gathering October 23-25 in Davis, California!

Questions?



Learn more on the Imagining America
National Gathering website:
imaginingamerica.org/what-we-do/national-gathering

All other questions can be directed to
connect@imaginingamerica.org
or call (530) 297-4640.



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