

# INTERNET2 COMMEX<sup>26</sup>

APRIL 13-16 | CHICAGO IL

## First Time Attendee Huddle

Know Before You Go

March 3, 2026



Over 25% of our attendees are first-timers—just like you, so you’re in great company!

## **Agenda**

- Welcome & Introductions
- About Internet2 Community Exchange
- Know Before You Go
- Conference Program Overview
- Links to Sign Up
- Conference Participation and Maximizing Your Experience
- After the Conference
- Resources
- Questions

## Welcome & Introductions

Dina Carr  
Director, Community Relationships



Taleitha McGuinnis  
Program Manager, Community Relationships



Meet the Internet2 Community Relationships Team.

## Internet2 CommEX26

- **Goals:**
  - IT leaders and their teams come together to shape the future of R&E technology
  - CommEX creates spaces that inspire peer-driven collaboration among CIOs, CISOs, directors, and other leaders, through hallway conversations, informal meetups, and group discussions, fostering real-time problem solving, and strategic and forward-looking conversations
- **Attendees:** Participants come from higher education, international, non-profit organizations, federal agencies, regional and state networks, InCommon participants, and the industry community
- **Tracks:** Emerging Technology; Data Privacy, Security, and Awareness; and IT Funding and Resource Sustainability Challenges
- **Format:** Engage in hands-on workshops, meetings, and conference sessions packed with actionable strategies and solutions you can implement at your institutions right away

**Dates:** April 13-16, 2026

**Location:** Chicago Marriott Downtown Magnificent Mile

Internet2 2026 Community Exchange 4

- CommEX is one of our two anchor events (large scale conferences) a year.
- CommEX is typically in the spring, and TechEX is in the fall/winter. 2026 TechEX is October 26-30 in Minneapolis.
- Each conference is about four or five days.
- Main tracks are Emerging Technology; Data Privacy, Security, and Awareness; and IT Funding and Resource Sustainability Challenges
- Great group of participants already registered, with registration still increasing. Not too late to register, we have a “make the case” doc and other resources - <https://events.internet2.edu/website/88260/make-the-case/>.

## Know Before You Go

- Internet2 mobile app
- Registration desk opens Mon., Apr. 13 at 7:00 a.m.
- Name badges
- Community Connectors
- Business attire
- Chicago in April

### Misc.

- Taking breaks
- Pack a reusable water bottle
- Don't forget your chargers

**FIRST TIME ATTENDEE**

**COMMUNITY  
CONNECTOR**



First-Time Attendee

Internet2 2026 Community Exchange

5

- Most of these items may seem obvious, but they are meant as friendly, helpful reminders. You can use this as a checklist as you go to pack for the event.
- App - Will be available about a week before the event. It will provide updates to sessions, room assignments, and be one of your most valuable resources at the event.
- Reg desk – Opens at 7am each day. Closes at 4:30 p.m. on Mon., at 6pm Tue-Wed. & 11am Thur. To beat the long lines on Tue., we encourage you to complete your registration on Mon if possible.
- Your name badge will have a first-time attendee ribbon.
- Badges will contain alcohol drink tickets in them for you to use at the Welcome Reception and Taste of Chicago. If you do not want to use them, you are welcome to pass them on to your colleagues or other appropriate conference attendees.
- To help first-time attendees feel welcome, we've created Community Connectors (CC). You must sign up to be paired with a CC; the link is on the next few slides.
- You can be paired with a CC who shares your interests or experience—even though you may be senior leaders, this is an opportunity to meet with those who may have more insight on Internet2, collaborate on shared challenges, etc.
- There will be a meet and greet for first-time attendees paired with Community Connectors on April 6 at 11:00 a.m. ET.

- Dress in layers, temps in rooms vary quite a bit. Some rooms are warm, others are cool inside which you'll want a cardigan or something warm. Bring comfortable shoes as rooms can be spaced apart. You'll be doing quite a bit of walking during the week.
- Chicago in April varies, best advice is to check the weather right before you travel there. The city holds true to its nickname of being windy due to being next to Lake Michigan, which can cause a cool breeze, pack accordingly for that factor. When we held this conference there two years ago at this time, we had warmer weather, in the low- to mid-60's, with winds.
- Laptops and phones may be used for notes or photos—please silence them to be respectful to the presenters and not cause distractions.
- Please feel free to take breaks beyond the designated morning and afternoon ones. It can be information overload at times, it is okay to step outside to get some fresh air or go up to your room to regroup.
- It may seem like a silly reminder, but attendees do forget their chargers. Don't forget yours! We will have a Power Up Bar where you can recharge.
- Look out for staff and CCs – can always ask us questions (as well as the team at the registration desk).
- Visit the first-time attendee webpage:  
<https://events.internet2.edu/website/88260/first-time-attendees/> .

## Conference Program Overview

| Mon., Apr. 13: Workshops & Meetings  | Tue., Apr. 14: Program, Meetings, BoFs  | Wed., Apr. 15: Program, Meetings, BoFs   | Thu., Apr. 16: Program, Meetings, BoFs   |
|--|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Two workshops</li><li>• One meeting</li><li>• Leadership Exchange (LEX)</li><li>• Walking Tour</li><li>• LEX Reception</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Keynote</li><li>• First-Timers' Lounge*</li><li>• Session across all tracks; Morning and afternoon breaks</li><li>• <b>Internet2 Welcome, Overview, &amp; First-Timer Lunch*</b></li><li>• Welcome Reception</li><li>• <b>Dine Arounds*</b></li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fun Run/Walk</li><li>• First-Timers' Lounge*</li><li>• Sessions across all tracks; Morning and afternoon breaks</li><li>• Taste of Chicago Reception</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Morning Plenary</li><li>• Sessions across all tracks</li><li>• Conference ends at noon</li></ul> |

\*These sessions are for first-time attendees specifically.



CommEX26 Program

Internet2 2026 Community Exchange

6

- Monday is a pre-event day. The official conference begins on Tuesday. Workshops are optional to register for if you feel they would complement your overall goals.
- You can amend your registration to add / change workshops.
- You **must be invited** to attend The Connector/Network Member Principals Meeting, and Leadership Exchange and Reception on Monday.
- We will have a designated First-Time Attendee and Community Connector lounge room on the 10<sup>th</sup> floor for those that signed up to be paired where you can arrange to meet your community connector there. You can eat your breakfast or lunch in there together if you want so it's easier to have conversation. You can use the space throughout the conference to meet and touch base and ask questions, further conversations / collaborations.
- There will also be meeting space available on the 4, 6, 7, and 10 floors that people can use.
- Walking Tour on Monday at 4:30 p.m. CT to help attendees get acclimated with the event space and feel better prepared as sessions will be on multiple floors.
- Tuesday from 10:30-11:50am will be the keynote speaker.
- Tuesday from 11:50am-1:30pm will be the Internet2 Welcome, Overview, &

First-Timer Lunch. Will provide an orientation to Internet2, perspectives on how members and partners optimize engagement with the community. Tips and guidance for the week, highlight opportunities and ways to get involved.

- Welcome Reception is from 5-6:30pm.
- The dine-arounds are mainly for first-time attendees to connect with the community, but all conference participants are welcome to join. Sign up is required. Meet in the lobby at 6:10pm, depart for restaurant at 6:20pm. Two great options: Doc B's (3 mins walk) and Robert's Pizza (13 mins walk).
- Another opportunity to meet fellow attendees is the Wed morning fun run/walk. The groups will be led by Internet2 staff members, and you can choose your pace. It's also an opportunity to see a little bit of downtown Chicago. 6:30-7:30am, meet in the lobby.
- Taste of Chicago Reception, come sample some yummy treats that are well associated with Chicago.
- Conference sessions end at noon on Thursday.
- You can view the full program using the QR code on the page or using this link, <https://events.internet2.edu/website/88260/program/>.

## Link to Sign Up

Get paired with a Community Connector & Sign up for a small group dinner (Dine Around):  
<https://forms.gle/WHZC6BzSSapVmScB9>



CC & Dine Around Sign Up



Internet2 2026 Community Exchange

7

- This is the link, <https://forms.gle/WHZC6BzSSapVmScB9>, to sign-up to be paired with a Community Connector and / or join a dine around.
- The deadline to sign-up to be paired with a Community Connector is April 1.
- The deadline to sign-up for the dine arounds is April 6.
- The First-Time Attendee and Community Connector meet and greet webinar is April 6 at 11:00 a.m. ET.
- These are great opportunities to expand your network, connect with this amazing community, and have fun along the way.

## Tips for Conference Participation & Maximizing Your Experience

- Review the program schedule ahead of time and identify sessions of interest
- Meet your Community Connector!
- Bring your business cards or use digital business card apps such as HiHello, Popl, or Blinq (or the scan feature on LinkedIn)
- Visit the exhibitors for unique insight and conversations related to your needs
- Share your learning and experiences by posting on social media using #CommEX26



Internet2 2026 Community Exchange 8

- Don't hesitate to introduce yourself, ask questions, share social links or other networking info, and make the most of your Community Connector.
- If you find a session especially valuable, feel free to ask the presenter for more information. Most are happy to share, unless restrictions prevent them from doing so.
- You can always ask Internet2 staff for help if you need something, there are plenty of us floating around.
- Be sure to visit the exhibitors! Get your questions answered, share your challenges—they may already have solutions for you.
- Update your LinkedIn profile to reflect current interests and experiences.
- Be sure to share your learning on social media using #CommEX26.

## After the Conference

**Feedback:** Complete the post-conference survey to help us improve future events and first-time attendees' experiences

**Get Involved:** There are multiple ways you can be a part of future CommEX conferences:

- Be part of the Program Committee
- Be a presenter
- Be a Community Connector



Internet2 2026 Community Exchange 9

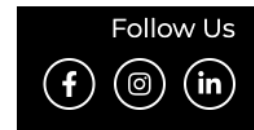
- **Follow-up:** Reach out to your new contacts.
- Be sure to follow up with your new contacts, including your Community Connector.
- Materials for some of the presentations will be posted online following the event. We will notify the community as they become available.
- Please complete the post-conference survey to help us in our efforts to provide a welcoming and engaging experience for all our first-time attendees at our future events.
- Get involved! Help us shape future conferences and content we bring to the community.

## Resources

Visit Internet2 Events: <https://internet2.edu/events/>

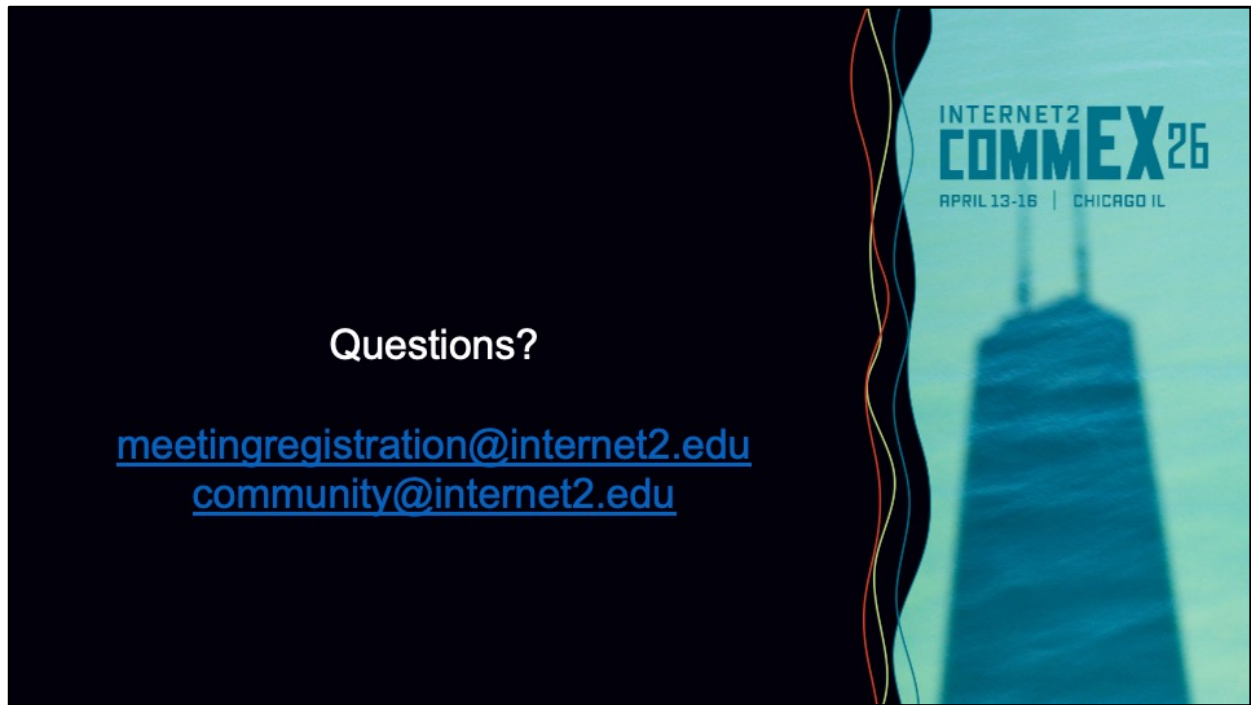
Social media:

- [LinkedIn](#)
- [Facebook](#)
- [Instagram](#)



Internet2 2026 Community Exchange 10

- Visit Internet2 Events: <https://internet2.edu/events/>
- Follow us on social media to stay informed and up-to-date on what Internet2 and the community are doing!
- We look forward to seeing in you Chicago soon!
- LinkedIn - <https://www.linkedin.com/company/internet2/posts/?feedView=all>
- Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/Internet2social>
- Instragram - <https://www.instagram.com/internet2social/>



If you have any questions or need help, including as it relates to your CommEX participation, please feel free to reach out to our events team at [meetingregistration@internet2.edu](mailto:meetingregistration@internet2.edu) or you can reach out to our Community Relationships team at [community@internet2.edu](mailto:community@internet2.edu).