



ESPLI Class of 2027

Program Overview and Application Requirements

Updated 5/6/25

ESPLI is a powerful leadership development program grounded in NEA's mission and values and offered exclusively to NEA's education support professionals (ESPs) nationwide. The member-designed program aims to train ESPs to be effective and influential leaders in their schools, unions, and communities. Participants engage in various professional learning opportunities to help sharpen their leadership skills, excel in their careers, positively impact student success, and build community relationships.

The program requires in-person training, virtual meetings, and independent assignments. To graduate, participants must participate in all required in-person and virtual sessions and identify, implement, and present a capstone project that addresses an issue/challenge in their worksite, union, or community. The project must reflect the participant's growth as a leader, connect to local or state affiliate priorities, put into practice at least one skill or content area learned from the program, and demonstrate outcomes and impact through evidence.

NEA will select up to 30 members to participate in this cohort. The program will begin in October 2025 and conclude in March 2027. Members accepted into the program will be notified in August 2025.

Eligibility Requirements:

- Must be an active Pre-K-12 or higher ed ESP member of an NEA local affiliate for at least the last two years (as of October 16, 2025).
- Must be in good standing with your local affiliate, state affiliate, and the NEA.
- Must attest that you have no plans to leave your current position as an ESP and plan to remain an active NEA ESP member throughout the duration of the program.
- Must commit to participating fully in all in-person and virtual sessions, and completing all independent assignments, including implementing and presenting a capstone project.
- Must secure release time to attend all required in-person sessions in advance.
- Must commit to utilizing the skills and knowledge learned in the program to engage in association leadership and further local, state, and national association goals and priorities.
- **Must submit the online application by midnight ET on June 25, 2025.**
- **Must submit the video introduction by midnight ET on June 30, 2025.**

Program Curriculum:

Participants of ESPLI will engage in thorough and targeted training across an array of leadership areas, including but not limited to:

- Self-Awareness and Self-Management (Use of Self)
- Time Management and Goal Setting
- True Colors (temperament and personality typing tool)
- Decision Making, Risk Taking, and Change Management
- Racial and Social Justice in Education
- Communication Skills
- Political Action and Advocacy

- Organizing and Capacity Building

In-Person and Virtual Meeting Requirements:

NEA will fund participants to attend all in-person sessions as permitted under the NEA travel guidelines, including transportation, lodging, meals, and substitute pay or salary reimbursement. All virtual meetings will be scheduled after the school day ends, and substitute pay or salary reimbursement will not be provided.

**All sessions listed below, except those noted “optional,” are mandatory. Additional optional virtual meetings will be scheduled, and those dates and times will be shared with participants who are accepted into the program.*

- October 16, 2025 (7:00-8:30 pm EST) – Virtual Meeting
- November 13, 2025 (7:00-8:30 pm EST) – Virtual Meeting
- January 14, 2026 (7:00-8:30 pm EST) – Virtual Meeting
- February 19-23, 2026 – In-person Meeting (location TBD)
- March 26-29, 2026 – NEA ESP National Conference (Anaheim, CA) (optional)
 - Travel Day – Wednesday, March 25
 - Pre-Conference – Thursday, March 26
 - Regular Conference – Friday, March 27 through Sunday, March 29
- May 12, 2026 (7:00-8:30 pm EST) – Virtual Meeting
- July 14, 2026 (7:00-8:30 pm EST) – Virtual Meeting
- September 15, 2026 (7:00-8:30 pm EST) – Virtual Meeting
- October 15-19, 2026 – In-person Meeting (location TBD)
- December 15, 2026 (7:00-8:30 pm EST) – Virtual Meeting
- February 16, 2027 (7:00-8:30 pm EST) – Virtual Meeting
- March 15-21, 2027 – Capstone Presentations, Graduation & NEA ESP National Conference (location TBD)
 - Travel Day – Monday, March 15
 - Capstone Project Presentations – Tuesday, March 16-Wednesday, March 17
 - Pre-Conference & Graduation – Thursday, March 18 (optional)
 - Regular Conference – Friday, March 19 through Sunday, March 21 (optional)

Securing Release Time

All members accepted in the program must secure release time for all required in-person sessions and attest to having done so. Participants must also attest that they understand that if they miss any required in-person or virtual meetings, they will not graduate from the program.

If accepted, participants will receive a release letter to share with their employer so they can begin the process of securing release time. We recognize that school districts may be unable to grant release time for the October 15-19, 2026, meeting since it takes place in the next school year. Participants must have secured release time for the February 19-23, 2026, meeting at a minimum to participate in the program. Participants must secure release time for the October 15-19, 2026, meeting in August 2026.

Application Requirements

Applications that do not conform to the following specifications will not be considered.

Online Applications

- Online applications must be completed electronically. Handwritten applications will not be accepted.

- Online applications must be submitted **by midnight ET on June 25, 2025**.
- A link to the online application can be found at the end of this document.

IMPORTANT! Before clicking on the link and completing the application, we **strongly recommend** you think about/complete the following questions in a separate document and then transfer your answers into the form once you are ready to submit.

Why is this strongly recommended?

- Some questions may require you to do some research and/or contact your Local President, UniServ Director, or State Affiliate for assistance.
- You CANNOT save your application and come back to finish it at a later date/time.

Application Questions

Note: There is a 4,000-character limit for all open-ended questions.

Personal Information

Additional questions (e.g., legal name, address, phone, age range) are asked in the form but not included below.

- What are your social media handles (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, TikTok)? Enter N/A if you do not use social media.
- How did you hear about the ESPLI program?

Worksite/Career Information

Additional questions (e.g., employment status, job title) are asked in the form but not included below.

- Which of the following NEA ESP Career Families do you most closely identify with? Visit www.nea.org/esp for career family descriptions.
 - Clerical Services
 - Custodial/Maintenance Services
 - Food Services
 - Health/Student Services
 - Paraeducators
 - Security Services
 - Skilled Trades
 - Technical Services
 - Transportation Services
- Name of School/Worksite (no abbreviations please)
- Name of School District/University (no abbreviations please)
- Worksite Level (Check all that apply.)
- Career Experience

Affiliate Information and Engagement

Reminder: There is a 4,000-character limit for each of these questions.

- What is your 10-Digit NEA Membership ID Number? (This can be found on the address label of your NEA Today magazine or by calling your State Affiliate.)
- Name of State Affiliate (no abbreviations please)
- What is your UniServ Director's name, email address, and phone number? This is your staff representative from your state affiliate. They may have the title Organizational Specialist, Labor Relations Specialist, Field Rep, or something else. If unsure, please check with your Local President or State Affiliate.
- Name of Local Affiliate (no abbreviations please)
- What is your Local President's name, email address, and phone number? If you are the Local President, please note that here.
- How many years have you been a member of your Local Affiliate?

- How many ESPs are currently members of your Local Affiliate?
- How many certified members (i.e., teachers, specialized instructional support personnel) (if any) are currently in your Local Affiliate?
- How many potential members are in your Local, including ESPs and certified members?
- How many years has your Local been organized/affiliated with NEA?
- Why and how did you get involved in your Association?
- What Local Affiliate, State Affiliate, or NEA training have you participated in?
- What elected or appointed positions, roles, or responsibilities do you CURRENTLY HAVE in your LOCAL Association? How long have you held each position/role or had these responsibilities?
- What elected or appointed positions, roles, or responsibilities HAVE YOU HAD IN THE PAST in your LOCAL Association? How long did you hold each position/role or have those responsibilities?
- What elected or appointed positions, roles, or responsibilities do you CURRENTLY HAVE in your STATE Association? How long have you held each position/role or had these responsibilities?
- What elected or appointed positions, roles, or responsibilities HAVE YOU HAD IN THE PAST in your STATE Association? How long did you hold each position/role or have those responsibilities?
- What elected or appointed positions, roles, or responsibilities do you CURRENTLY HAVE in your NATIONAL Association (NEA)? How long have you held each position/role or had these responsibilities?
- What elected or appointed positions, roles, or responsibilities HAVE YOU HAD IN THE PAST in your NATIONAL Association (NEA)? How long did you hold each position/role or have those responsibilities?

Capstone Projects

Reminder: There is a 4,000-character limit for this question.

To graduate, participants must identify, implement, and present a capstone project that connects to local or state affiliate priorities and addresses an issue/challenge in their worksite, union, or community.

1. Please describe an issue or challenge in your worksite, union, or community that you might consider as the focus of your capstone project. Please describe the issue/challenge, who the problem impacts, and why this is important to you.

Leadership Aspirations and Engagement

Please be specific. Reminder: There is a 4,000-character limit for each of these questions.

1. What are your Association leadership aspirations, and how will they help you grow and strengthen your Local Association? Note: We are NOT looking for positions or titles to which you wish to be appointed or elected in the future.
2. How do you think ESPLI will help you lead, engage, and advocate in the current environment where public education is under attack?
3. Identify two leadership skills you want to enhance through ESPLI and describe why.
4. What strengths and positive qualities do you bring to ESPLI (brag on yourself!)?

Personal Video Introductions

- Applicants must also submit a short personal video introduction (**7 minutes max**) by **midnight ET on June 30, 2025**.
- Applicants will receive an email with instructions on how to submit the video **within two business days** after the online application is received.

- Videos must be of high enough quality for the selection committee to see and hear the applicant. They do not need to be "flashy" or polished. They can be recorded on a mobile phone, iPad, computer, Zoom, or other chosen method/device. **The selection committee is looking for substance, not high-quality/professional videos!**
- Failure to submit a video by **midnight ET on June 30, 2025**, will disqualify applicants from being considered.

Applicants must answer the following questions in their videos:

1. Who are three leaders that you admire and why?
2. Why do you think you should be accepted into the program?
3. Where do you see yourself in your Association in 3-5 years?
4. Where do you see yourself in your career in 3-5 years?
5. What do you like to do in your free time/what are your hobbies?

Questions? Contact Jennie Young, Program Coordinator, jyoung@nea.org, (410) 370-5279.

Access the online application from the link below:

<https://forms.office.com/r/sR5cebmdq9>