ROMANIAN UNITED FOUNDATION

ROMANIAN COMMUNITY SUMMIT 2026 · REPORT

What we heard. What comes next.

The main stage in Chicago, Saturday, September 19, 2026, and nine ideas to carry into 2027. For speakers, partners, organizers, officials and everyone who wants to keep the work going.

Chicago, Illinois
September 18-20, 2026
Christian Heritage Academy, Northfield

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WHY THIS REPORT

One day, one room, a lot of good ideas.

On Saturday, September 19, the main hall of the Romanian Community Summit ran from 9 in the morning to the evening happy hour. Diplomats, elected officials, founders, scientists, lawyers, students and families shared one stage.

A lot was said. Good ideas from a summit tend to stay in the room unless someone writes them down and asks who will pick them up. That is what this report does. Part one is a short account of each session. Part two is nine ideas we heard that deserve a second life in 2027, each with a suggested next step. Part three is how speakers, partners and institutions can help.

Nothing here is final. Treat it as an open invitation.

43
cities represented in the room

34
sponsors, a record for the Summit

170
partner organizations

101
young people honored by the Romanian Heritage Awards, from 19 states

300+
essays submitted by Heritage Award candidates

57
nominations for the Community Impact Awards

THE THREAD THROUGH THE WHOLE DAY

"Diaspora can act as an infrastructure, not just as an emotion."

Said on stage during the Brain Trust panel, and it held for every session after. The votes, the expertise, the capital and the next generation are already here. The work now is to organize them.

PART ONE

The main stage, session by session

Times are from the livestream. Sessions held in Romanian and in side rooms are not covered here.

MORNING · OPENING KEYNOTE

GlobalRomania: a trusted Romanian in every city

Mihai Lehene, President, Romanian United Foundation

- The network is for builders. Members bring one of three things: capital, expertise or connections.
- It started as "Project 300": one trusted person in 300 cities. It took about two years to get there.
- A parent asked on the app for anyone at TU Delft. A student ambassador was connected in under 24 hours.
- The goal by 2032: a trusted Romanian in every city, institution and corporation in the world.

PANEL · CIVIC VOICE

The Romanian-American vote

Moderated by Bishop Florin Cîmpean, with Ben Toma (former Speaker, Arizona House of Representatives), Hans G. Klemm (former U.S. Ambassador to Romania) and Matei Puiu (Endava)

- Roughly 550,000 Romanians in the U.S. could vote in Romania's last presidential election. About 25,000 did, and that was a record.
- Ben Toma: his party held the Arizona House, and he the Speaker's chair, by 269 votes statewide.
- Amb. Klemm: the Romanian-American voice in Washington is far weaker than the Italian, Polish or Hungarian ones. He suggested a political action committee.
- Matei Puiu: six diaspora seats in Parliament are a direct line. Valid papers come first.

FIRESIDE CHAT · BUSINESS

How AI agents will rewire business

Mihai Lehene with Vadim, Chief AI Officer, RebelDot (the Summit's visionary sponsor)

- A chatbot answers questions. An agent does the work, using the same tools your team already uses.
- Pick the first agent by three tests: tasks that vary each time, tasks with real volume, and work a person can review.
- A first "digital employee" can be running in about two weeks. Keep a human in the lead wherever a customer is involved.

PANEL · EXPERTISE

The Diaspora Brain Trust

Moderated by Ionel Dragoș Hău, with Ioana Cozmuța (G-Space), George Roth (Recognos), Radu Magdin (Smartlink Communications) and an energy technology adviser and investor

- Earlier diaspora councils stalled: no structure, no expectations set, and ministers changed mid-way.
- On data centers, energy and nuclear projects, transparency with the public decides whether projects survive.
- The panel read the **Chicago Declaration**: independent technical review for Romania's strategic projects, decisions based on evidence and not political cycles, and advice published openly.

LEADERSHIP PANEL · TECHNOLOGY

Building global technology companies

Introduced by Bogdan Căpățână (Ford, RACC-IT). Moderated by Matei Puiu, with Sergiu Neguț (FintechOS), Voicu Oprean (AROBS), Tudi Ciuleanu (RebelDot), George Roth (Recognos), Radu Roșu (Eloquentix) and the founder of System2

- Entering the U.S. takes patience, money, a local face and local partners. U.S. security certifications alone can take many months.
- Reputation travels by people. The diaspora can vouch for Romanian firms, and they should sell on quality: "Made in Romania."
- AROBS grew in the U.S. by buying a 70-person American firm after a first attempt failed.
- AI can help Romanian IT: sell outcomes, not hours.

PANEL · PRACTICAL HELP

Immigration 360

Dana Bucin (immigration attorney, Honorary Consul of Romania in Connecticut), Matthew Bowker (Lodge Financial) and Anca Miclea (Miclea & Associates)

- Romania is one of about 80 countries with an E-2 treaty: a U.S. visa for founders who invest roughly $100,000. Too few know it.
- Honest, consistent tax returns protect your immigration file and your ability to borrow.
- Build a relationship with a licensed lawyer before an emergency. Check licenses, and get a second opinion if told "nothing can be done."

PANEL · SCIENCE

Diaspora labs and industry: Romania's biotech

Mihaela Madaraș (Bio Mentor Hub) with Dr. Vlad Vitoc (MAIA Biotechnology) and Michael S. Rosen (Helix 51, Rosalind Franklin University)

- Romania ranks last on the EU innovation scoreboard. The talent is there; the bridge to the market is missing.
- Startups rarely die from the science. They die from manufacturing, trial design and the first funding conversations.
- What helps most: operators who have done it, translators from lab to clinic, door openers measured by term sheets, and patient capital.

AFTERNOON · NEXT GENERATION AND AWARDS

Youth programs, heritage and community

RUF youth leads, Unpublished Romania (Nelu Lazăr), FORA (Simona Vasile and Nelu Lazăr) and the Community Impact Awards jury

- Rose Scholars made its first award: $2,500 to a high school student in Zalău, funded by one donor.
- The Romanian Heritage Awards honored 101 young people from 19 states. Their official ceremony followed in Washington, D.C.
- Five Community Impact Awards closed the day (next page).

COMMUNITY IMPACT AWARDS 2026

Future Maker	Dr. Diana Gîrniță, founder of Rheumatologist OnCall, a telemedicine practice for autoimmune conditions now serving patients in 20 states
Impact Through Excellence	Dana Bucin, immigration attorney and Honorary Consul of Romania in Connecticut
Individual Leadership	Nelu Lazăr, founder of Unpublished Romania and TEDx Lafayette
Organizational Leadership	Oana Babagianu, Future Romania, an independent academy for public leadership in Bucharest
Steward of Our Roots	Ionel Dragoș Hău and Antonia Baroga, Romanul in Connecticut and its online Romanian school

PART TWO

Nine ideas to carry into 2027

Grouped in three themes. Each one came from the stage. The next steps are suggestions, open to anyone who wants to pick them up.

1 A louder civic voice

1. Turn votes into influence

> **"Knowing who to call is so incredibly important... You're basically one person, one call away from the right answer."**
>
> Ben Toma, former Speaker, Arizona House of Representatives

WHAT WE HEARD

Elections are often decided by a few hundred votes, and Romanians who could vote don't. Candidates who lose once usually learn and win later, if the community keeps backing them. Amb. Klemm suggested a political action committee.

SUGGESTED NEXT STEP

A shared push for valid documents and voter registration, built with the consulates. A list of Romanian-American candidates at every level, from school boards up, supported across party lines.

2. Give the Chicago Declaration its first piece of work

> **"If there is no structure on which to build, there is no foundation on which to make this expertise available."**
>
> Ioana Cozmuța, G-Space

WHAT WE HEARD

Diaspora experts want to help Romania decide well on energy, data centers and AI. Past councils faded because nothing was set up around them. Panelists also argued that paid advice gets taken more seriously than free advice.

SUGGESTED NEXT STEP

One independent, public technical opinion on a live Romanian project, published before the 2027 Summit and presented there. Signed by experts with no financial stake in the project.

3. Know your options before you need them

> **"I cannot tell you how many Romanian entrepreneurs I know who are now undocumented because they didn't know about this on time."**
>
> Dana Bucin, on the E-2 investor visa

WHAT WE HEARD

Romanian founders qualify for the E-2 visa and few use it. Families are safest when a licensed lawyer already has their documents. Scams are getting more elaborate.

SUGGESTED NEXT STEP

Publish the visa guide for Romanian nationals that Dana Bucin and ROCO announced on stage. In 2027, give founders and students their own session on visa options.

2 Capital and business

4. Vouch for Romanian companies in the U.S.

> **"When we come here, no one knows about us... You can be our partners, help us bridge that gap, vouching for us."**
>
> Tudi Ciuleanu, RebelDot

WHAT WE HEARD

Romanian tech firms sell on quality, but U.S. buyers want references. Radu Roșu proposed putting "Made in Romania" on the work with pride. Voicu Oprean repeated an open offer from the stage: AROBS will share 20% of any U.S. contract an introduction brings in.

SUGGESTED NEXT STEP

A simple referral channel: diaspora professionals inside U.S. companies flag real needs, and Romanian firms answer them. Follow it through RACC-IT's 2027 events in Texas, Chicago, Washington and San Francisco.

5. Invest in each other

> **"The reason Silicon Valley is Silicon Valley is that a small group of people invested in other people's businesses."**
>
> Sergiu Neguț, FintechOS

WHAT WE HEARD

About ten Romanian funds now back startups, and diaspora investors and advisors are welcome in them. In biotech, the panel called for a small group of patient investors who have lost money before and invest across several companies.

SUGGESTED NEXT STEP

A diaspora angel circle that meets a few times a year, sees vetted Romanian companies, and invests in small checks. Start with the people already on this stage.

6. Build the bridge for Romanian biotech

> **"The science is rarely what kills the company."**
>
> Dr. Vlad Vitoc, MAIA Biotechnology

WHAT WE HEARD

Bio Mentor Hub has trained about 400 young scientists with 56 international mentors. The panel named what comes next: operators, translators, door openers and capital, plus a standard data room and an easy legal and banking route for U.S. money into Romania.

SUGGESTED NEXT STEP

Ten diaspora operators who each give Bio Mentor Hub teams a few hours a quarter, tracked by results. Michael Rosen's idea of a first annual Romania biotech report, built with a major audit firm, is worth pursuing.

3 The next generation

7. Put the Heritage Award essays in a book

> **"It's literally a summary of who we are as a community."**
>
> Simona Vasile, FORA, on the 300+ essays

WHAT WE HEARD

Young people from 19 states were honored. Some came from families with every advantage, others from homes where parents work three jobs. The organizers want to reach more states and give cash awards to the kids who need them most.

SUGGESTED NEXT STEP

Publish a book of essay excerpts in 2027, as the organizers committed to on stage. Community leaders in the other states can nominate young people and write recommendation letters.

8. Keep the language at home

> **"Integration should not come with the loss of their identity, of their roots, of their language."**
>
> Antonia Baroga, Romanul in Connecticut

WHAT WE HEARD

Many children of the diaspora cannot talk to their grandparents. Online Romanian schools exist, but school alone is not enough. Parents have to speak Romanian at home.

SUGGESTED NEXT STEP

A joint campaign aimed at parents, run with Romanul's online school and community organizations in every city. Simple, shareable and in both languages.

9. Fund a scholarship in your own name

> **"Reflect on a person or a place that really made an impact in your journey... and consider giving that same opportunity to someone else."**
>
> Rose Scholars program lead

WHAT WE HEARD

Rose Scholars lets a donor set the criteria and the amount, and the team handles the rest. Gifts through Romanian United Foundation are tax-deductible. The first award went to a student in Zalău.

SUGGESTED NEXT STEP

Ten named scholarships by the 2027 Summit, with each recipient invited to the stage. Speakers and award winners can each start one for their own school or hometown.

PART THREE

How to keep this going

Three things each group can do now, without waiting for September 2027.

Speakers and moderators

- Pick the one idea in this report closest to your session and tell us if you want to lead it.
- Share your session's key point with your own network and tag the Summit.
- Introduce one person who should be on the 2027 stage.

Partners and sponsors

- Bring one real business need to the referral channel (idea 4) or the angel circle (idea 5).
- Name a scholarship through Rose Scholars (idea 9).
- Host a small follow-up in your city: a breakfast, a clinic, a founders' evening.

Officials and institutions

- Keep consular caravans going so more Romanians have valid papers (idea 1).
- Give the Chicago Declaration group a named contact and one real question to answer (idea 2).
- Help us reach Romanian students and families in the states the Heritage Awards don't reach yet (idea 7).

JOIN THE NETWORK

GlobalRomania connects Romanians across cities, universities and companies, so a question like "do you know anyone at TU Delft?" gets an answer in a day.

Membership is normally by invitation. Everyone at the Summit, and everyone reading this report, is welcome to apply.

THANK YOU

To our 34 sponsors, led by visionary sponsor RebelDot and engagement sponsor Pony Express Group. To our 170 partners, the Consulate General of Romania in Chicago, our speakers and moderators, our MCs Elena Gabor and her Romanian-language co-host, and the volunteers who ran the day behind the stage.

ROMANIAN UNITED FOUNDATION

ABOUT THE SUMMIT

Romanian Community Summit

An annual gathering in Chicago of Romanians from across North America and beyond: business, civic life, science, education, heritage and the next generation. The 2026 edition ran September 18-20 at Christian Heritage Academy in Northfield, Illinois, and was livestreamed.

ABOUT THE PUBLISHER

Romanian United Foundation

A Chicago-based nonprofit working to mobilize the Romanian diaspora. Its programs include GlobalRomania, the Romanian Community Summit and civic engagement work in Washington, D.C.

Want to pick up one of these ideas?

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Source: the main-stage livestream of September 19, 2026 (youtube.com/watch?v=oDerBSvTivA). Quotes are taken from the recording and lightly edited for readability. Figures are as stated on stage. This report may be shared freely.

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