

# NRF FOUNDATION EMERGING LEADERS

## NRF Foundation Emerging Leaders Summit

### Sponsor Engagement Guide

This resource is designed to help Emerging Leaders sponsors clearly understand how to select and prepare their attendees, set expectations, and provide appropriate support both before and after the Emerging Leaders Summit. It ensures your employees maximize their learning, networking, and leadership development opportunities.

#### 1. Understanding the Emerging Leaders Summit

The Emerging Leaders Summit is an invitation-only event filled with networking, learning and skill building that brings together 100 early retail professionals, retail leaders and subject-matter experts to provide exclusive insights and engaging professional development that will help early careerists become stronger future leaders.

The Emerging Leaders Summit Provides early careerists with:

- Knowledge of the wider world of retail directly from industry experts
- A network of retail industry peers
- Workforce navigation skills to be engaged, authentic, and successful

#### 2. Selecting Your Attendees

Sending attendees is an impactful way to invest in your current talent, offering them high-quality professional development that strengthens leadership readiness and broadens their understanding of the retail industry. By providing intentional upskilling and exposure to cross-functional insights, the Summit helps prepare employees for future promotions, equips them with the tools to thrive as emerging managers, and sets them up for long-term success within your organization.

- Criteria to attend include:

- Full-time employment at a retail company
- Entry-level up to manager roles in any function within the organization.
- A demonstrated potential and desire to grow in a retail career
- A commitment to cultivating a culture of inclusion and belonging

- a. Recommended Processes to Select Attendees include:

- Source nominations from senior leaders or HR Business partners
- Provide eligibility criteria – both those defined by the NRF Foundation for the program, and any additional criteria you would like to add. Some examples of additional criteria are below:
  - High Potential - specific 9 box criteria

- Individuals who are 2-5 years into their retail career
- Individuals who have recently been promoted to management roles for the first time
- Individuals who have demonstrated a commitment to strategic impact that has supported inclusion and belonging within your org. For example, those who are participating in employee resource groups or similar efforts.
- Individuals who were offered full-time roles as a result of your internship program 2-3 years ago
- Individuals local to the DC area - consider store or remote employees if your brand doesn't have a DC area office
- Select an array of individuals from different parts of the business
- Application process for eligible individuals interested in attending

Attendees from the 2025 Summit had an average of 2.5 years of experience at their current company and represented 20 different functions within their organizations such as merchandising, marketing, communications, supply chain, store management, finance and more. An attendee group with cross-functional backgrounds maximizes learning and networking across the broad spectrum of retail roles.

Attendees can represent corporate, stores, or supply chain facility functions. They should be ambitious early retail careerists with strong leadership potential and a clear interest in development opportunities to advance their careers and networks. Attendees should come ready to engage, learn, ask questions, and take learnings back to implement and share with their teams.

b. Titles of Past Participants include:

- |                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| ● Financial Analyst            | ● Inventory Planner                      |
| ● Associate Product Analyst    | ● Inventory Analyst                      |
| ● Public Relations Coordinator | ● Site Leader                            |
| ● Human Resources Generalist   | ● Customer Experience Assistant Manager  |
| ● Assistant Buyer              | ● Inventory Operations Assistant Manager |
| ● Associate Buyer              | ● Design Specialist                      |
| ● Merchandiser                 | ● Softwear Engineer                      |
| ● Account Manager              | ● Recruiting Specialist                  |
| ● Customer Experience Manager  | ● Talent Development Specialist          |
| ● Assistant General Manager    | ● Recruiter                              |
| ● Store Manager                |  |
| ● Store Leader                 |  |
| ● Associate Merchant           |  |

### 3. Preparing Your Attendees Before the Summit

Preparing your attendees before the Summit sets the foundation for a meaningful and impactful experience. By encouraging them to review pre-work, research speakers, and understand the purpose of the event, you can help attendees arrive confident, engaged, and ready to participate fully in the interactive sessions and networking opportunities that define the Summit. Taking these steps in advance ensures attendees make the most of the program and return to your organization with stronger skills, clearer insights, and actionable takeaways.

- a. Communicate the purpose of the Summit – explain that they have been selected to participate in a high-impact professional development opportunity designed to accelerate leadership readiness, broaden retail knowledge, and expand their networks. Share the

pdf invite provided by the NRF Foundation and below is example copy to use when inviting your attendees to the Summit

- b. Reinforce why they were chosen - companies should clearly articulate to attendees the leadership qualities they've demonstrated, the skills the company wants them to gain by attending the Summit and how attending fits into their long-term growth plan.
- c. Have a leader attend the Summit with them – it's recommended that companies send a mid-to-senior leader to accompany their attendees. A leader's presence can make participants feel more at ease, facilitate introductions among attendees within the organization, and provide support for any travel or internal inquiries. Additionally, leaders can observe the Summit firsthand and help internal follow-through on key learnings.
- d. Share travel and expense protocols – companies should provide clear instructions for booking travel and expense policies such as per diems, submitting expense reports, reimbursement timelines, etc. For many attendees, this is their first experience with business travel at your organization. It's valuable to approach this as an opportunity for professional growth, enabling attendees to gain experience in corporate travel.
- e. Promote attendee preparation prior to the Summit – The NRF Foundation will send pre-work materials and recommend that attendees research speakers in advance. Companies are encouraged to emphasize the importance of prep work to their participants. In previous years, some companies have hosted prep calls with their attendees ahead of the Summit to go over all event details.
- f. Email copy when inviting attendees to the Summit:

Hello [Name],

We're excited to share that you have been selected to attend the [NRF Foundation's Emerging Leaders Summit](#), taking place September 10–11, 2026 in Washington, D.C.

Attached is your official event invitation with full details.

This Summit brings together 100 early-career retail professionals and industry leaders for two days of learning, networking and skill-building designed to accelerate your leadership journey. You were chosen because you've demonstrated strong potential, a commitment to growth, and the qualities that position you for future leadership opportunities within our organization.

As you review this opportunity, we encourage you to approach the Summit with curiosity, engagement and a mindset focused on your long-term development. We're thrilled to invest in your growth and look forward to the insights you'll bring back to the team.

Best,  
[Your Name]

#### 4. Onsite Engagement Best Practices

Showing up fully and professionally onsite is essential to ensuring attendees get the most out of the Summit. Being intentional about how attendees show up onsite maximizes their learning, strengthens their network, and elevates the overall impact of the experience.

- a. Attendees are encouraged to be present and fully engaged. Sessions are designed for active participation and real-time engagement with industry leaders so arriving ready to

contribute allows attendees to build meaningful connections, ask thoughtful questions, and represent their company with confidence.

- b. Leaders attending the Summit are encouraged to help facilitate introductions between your attendees and help foster their company's culture. In previous years, leaders took attendees to dinner, attended the networking reception, coordinated check ins onsite, and facilitated group photos.

## 5. Post-Event Actionable Next Steps

The NRF Foundation will host two virtual meetings for all Emerging Leaders Summit attendees in the weeks following the Summit. Attending these sessions offers participants a chance to reconnect and continue their professional development.

All NRF Foundation Emerging Leaders attendees will receive a complimentary pass to [NRF 2027: Retail's Big Show](#) on January 10-12, 2027. The NRF Foundation will provide justification letters for attendees to help make the business case on why they should attend.

The NRF Foundation also encourages all attendees to sign up for NRF resources such as NRF Retail Newsletters, NRF Center for Retail & Consumer Insights, NRF State of Retail and the Consumer, NRF Retail Gets Real Podcast and more.

Alongside NRF events and resources, companies are encouraged to incorporate the experiences gained by attendees at Emerging Leaders into their company culture and establish actionable follow-up items for participants after the Summit. Examples may include:

- a. Internal debriefs with attendees and their managers
- b. Attendees to present learnings, key takeaways, impact and experience to leadership, their teams or HR business partners
- c. Form internal cohort or ERG for attendees to meet on a scheduled basis
- d. Capture learnings in a brief written report
- e. Share highlights in internal comms (newsletter or memo) or external comms (LinkedIn post) to recognize participants and support for their career development
- f. Encourage attendees to post on LinkedIn to reflect on their experience