



Welcome!



Welcome to Colonial Williamsburg Resorts, a place where bold ideas once took hold and continue to inspire new possibilities today. Our team is honored to host VSAE's Annual Conference and to welcome you to a setting uniquely suited for thoughtful discussions and professional connections with a shared purpose.

As we mark the nation's semiquincentennial and the 100th anniversary of The Colonial Williamsburg

Foundation, we reflect on a century of preservation, education, and civic engagement. What began in 1926 as John D. Rockefeller, Jr.'s vision to restore Virginia's colonial capital has grown into the world's largest U.S. history museum, bringing to life the stories, debates, and decisions that shaped a nation.

Here, you will gather in the very place where the ideas of the American Revolution began to take root. Ideas grounded in leadership, collaboration, and a vision for the future. It is in that same spirit that we welcome VSAE members to exchange insight, strengthen relationships, and discover new opportunities that extend well beyond this conference.

Williamsburg is more than a destination; it is an experience designed to engage, challenge, and connect. Whether walking historic streets, participating in conference sessions, or building new partnerships, we hope your time here sparks meaningful conversations and lasting impact.

Our mission, "That the future may learn from the past," guides everything we do. We invite you to immerse yourself in this place, draw inspiration from its stories, and carry that perspective forward into your work and your communities.

As a proud member of VSAE, it is especially meaningful to welcome you here. Thank you for joining us, we look forward to the connections and ideas that will emerge.

Huzzah!



Welcome to the Historic Triangle—home to Williamsburg, Jamestown, and Yorktown—and host of VSAE's Annual Conference.

As a long-time member of the Virginia Society of Association Executives, it is truly an honor to welcome you to a destination that blends rich history with

modern meetings and memorable experiences. Your continued involvement and commitment to this organization is what makes gatherings like this so impactful, and we are thrilled to have you here.

This year is especially meaningful for us. As we commemorate the 250th anniversary of our nation's founding, there is an unmistakable energy throughout the region. From the living history of Colonial Williamsburg to the shores where history was made in Yorktown Battlefield, you are experiencing this destination at a truly remarkable moment in time.

Beyond the conference sessions, we encourage you to explore, connect, and enjoy all that the Historic Triangle has to offer—whether that's world-class dining, unique attractions, or simply taking in the charm and character that make this place so special.

Thank you for your dedication to VSAE and for being part of a community that continues to inspire and lead. We are excited to host you and hope your time here is both productive and unforgettable. From all of us here at Visit Williamsburg – Welcome!!

Warm regards,

Brittany Rice, Director of Sales
Colonial Williamsburg Resorts

Brittany Alger, Director of Sales
Visit Williamsburg



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Let's Make Lasting Connections!



Dear VSAE Colleagues and Friends,

Welcome to the VSAE Annual Conference. As we gather this year, we do so at a truly historic moment. In 2026, we celebrate the nation's 250th anniversary alongside Colonial Williamsburg's 100th. There is no more fitting place for this meaningful convergence of professional growth and national commemoration.

My sincere thanks to our partners at Colonial Williamsburg Resorts and Visit Williamsburg for their warm hospitality and support. Their commitment to excellence invites our community into a vibrant and inspiring setting that seamlessly blends world-renowned American colonial history with the sophistication and innovation of modern-day meetings and events.

This year's conference schedule reflects the dedicated efforts of VSAE's Professional Development Committee, showcasing exceptional speakers, peer-led breakout sessions, invaluable networking opportunities, and strategic insight. New in 2026, Suggested Learning Pathways provide optional guidance to help attendees navigate sessions based on career stage, role, and areas of interest. While all sessions are designed to be valuable across experience levels, these pathways—along with clearly identified CAE domains—offer additional support as you personalize your conference experience.

I encourage you to take full advantage of the many ways to connect and collaborate throughout the conference. Participate in Netwalking, exchange ideas with peers at the Book Club breakfast, actively engage in breakout sessions, and make time for conversations beyond the scheduled agenda. These interactions are central to the VSAE experience and often lead to the most meaningful insights and lasting connections.

Please also be sure to connect with our industry partners who not only attend but also sponsor and exhibit throughout the conference. This is a wonderful opportunity to explore new partnerships that can help you achieve your strategic goals or address emerging business challenges. New this year, the Diamond Sponsor Silent Auction features unique and exciting items in a setting designed to encourage networking with our generous Diamond Sponsors. I hope you will stop by, connect, and participate in this exciting addition.

Thank you for being part of the VSAE community and for contributing to the energy and impact of this conference. I wish you a rewarding, engaging, and memorable experience in Williamsburg.

Abby Tammen, AHWD
2025–2026 President
Virginia Society of Association Executives

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AGENDA

Refer to the Mobile App by Engagefully for the most up-to-date schedule, along with learning pathways that highlight recommended breakout sessions based on your role and career stage.



7.75
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Sunday, May 3

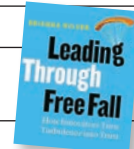
10:00 am–4:00 pm	Pre-conference Activities
5:15–6:00 pm	New Member and First-Time Attendee Mixer (invitation only) <i>Fountain Garden (Rain Backup: Allegheny Room)</i>
6:00–7:30 pm	Opening Reception (all attendees) <i>Oval Garden (Rain Backup: Tidewater Room)</i>
7:30 pm	Dine on Your Own

Monday, May 4

7:00–8:15 am	Breakfast <i>Colony Foyer</i>
8:15–8:30 am	Opening Remarks <i>Colony Room ABCDE</i>
8:30–9:30 am	OPENING KEYNOTE: Connect For Keeps (see article on page 9) <i>Colony Room ABCDE</i>
9:45–11:00 am	Breakout Sessions More Than a Vision Statement: Operationalizing Transformation in Associations <i>Allegheny Room</i> Ethical Decision-Making for Today's Association Leaders <i>Virginia C</i> Beyond Membership: Strengthening Culture and Performance in Association Teams <i>Virginia AB</i>
11:15 am–12:45 pm	Luncheon, 2026–2027 Board Installation and CAE Recognitions <i>Colony Room ABCDE</i>
1:00–2:15 pm	Breakout Sessions Mission-Driven Leadership: Uniting Governance and Volunteer Engagement <i>Allegheny ABC</i> Befriending the Black Swan: Planning for Effective Crisis Communication <i>Virginia AB</i> From Transition to Continuity: Strengthening Board–Executive Alignment <i>Virginia C</i>
2:30–3:30 pm	Breakout Sessions Navigating Burnout in the Association World <i>Virginia AB</i> Digging for Truth: Uncovering Drivers of Membership & Retention <i>Allegheny ABC</i>
3:30–4:30 pm	Shared Interest Group (SIG) Meetings <i>Refer to app for location</i>
5:30–6:15 pm	President's Reception (invitation only) <i>East Lounge (at The Inn)</i>
6:30–7:30 pm	Reception <i>Virginia Foyer</i>
7:30–9:00 pm	Dinner <i>Virginia Room ABCDE</i>
9:00 pm	Dessert & After Dinner Entertainment <i>Virginia Room F / The Lawn</i>

Tuesday, May 5

7:00–8:00 am	Early Riser Optional Activity: Net-Walking in Williamsburg <i>Meet in hotel lobby</i>
8:00–9:00 am	Breakfast <i>Colony Foyer</i>
8:00–9:00 am	Book Club: Leading Through Free Fall: How Innovators Turn Turbulence into Trust , by Brianna Sylver <i>Patriot Room</i>
9:00–10:15 am	CLOSING KEYNOTE: Choose to Rise: 5 Keys to Maintain Balance and Ignite Momentum (see article on page 11) <i>Colony Room ABCDE</i>
10:30–11:30 am	General Session No Theory, Just Practice: Real AI Tactics Your Association Can Steal Today (see article on page 10) <i>Colony Room ABCDE</i>
11:30–11:45 am	Closing Remarks and 2027 Annual Conference Host Announcement <i>Colony Room ABCDE</i>



KEYNOTE & BREAKOUT SESSIONS

OPENING KEYNOTE

Connect for Keeps



Sean Bott, Sean Bott LLC

People don't leave companies—they leave management (and maybe a few bad jokes). When employees feel unseen and unrecognized, engagement suffers. This keynote blends proven techniques from therapeutic and self-compassion research to help your team create meaningful connection and make others feel valued. Add in memorable mind-reading moments and a touch of humor, and it's a session your team will be talking about long after it ends. *Presented courtesy of PK Speakers Bureau.*

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Beyond Membership: Strengthening Culture and Performance in Association Teams



Christopher Jones, Founder
Authentic Leader

Association leaders must balance member expectations, board relationships, finances, and high-performing teams in a complex environment. Effective leadership goes beyond task management—it requires building a culture of trust, accountability, and engagement. Gain practical frameworks and actionable strategies to strengthen team performance, foster a thriving workplace, and elevate your association's impact.

Ethical Decision-Making for Today's Association Leaders



Holly Davis, CAE
Principal Consultant
Gauge Strategy LLC

Ethical decision-making is vital to association leadership, driving trust, transparency, and long-term impact. This course covers core principles and real-world challenges—from sponsor influence and digital privacy to conflicts of interest and fair resource allocation. Through interactive discussion and practical frameworks, participants gain tools to lead with integrity, strengthen accountability, and build values-driven teams.

More Than a Vision Statement: Operationalizing Transformation in Associations



Kelsey Croston, COO
Richmond Association of REALTORS

The association industry is driven by financial pressures, shifting regulations, diverse member expectations, and technology disruption. This means tomorrow's success hinges on operational excellence today. Many sectors not only need strategic change, but transformation.

This session explores how leaders can apply change management principles alongside core operational disciplines to guide their associations through transformation.

Mission-Driven Leadership: Uniting Governance and Volunteer Engagement



Kelly Ann Gull, CAE, Director, Professional Development and Training, National Society of Professional Engineers

Michelle Runge, CAE, Director of Chapter Relations
The American Inns of Court



"Mission-driven" is a common claim—but how well do governance and volunteer structures actually advance the mission? This session explores how aligning governance with volunteer management drives meaningful engagement and strategic impact. Learn how to empower board and volunteer leaders through clear roles, training, and recognition, and how governance, leadership development, and volunteer frameworks work together. Walk away with practical ideas to strengthen your pipeline, refine orientation, and move from mission-stated to mission-activated.

Befriending the Black Swan: Planning for Effective Crisis Communication



Brian Chandler, APR, Founder & CEO
Commonwealth Public Relations & Marketing

Crisis communications only become crises when teams aren't prepared—and many are avoidable. This session explores proactive planning and emergency protocols for association leaders, staff, and boards. Learn how to build a crisis communication playbook through "what-if" scenario planning, establish clear approval processes, and craft effective messaging for issues like executive misconduct, board conflict, financial missteps, legislative misalignment, and cybersecurity risks.

From Transition to Continuity: Strengthening Board-Executive Alignment



Alison Teitelbaum, MS, MPH, CAE
Founder & Principal Consultant, AST Strategies

Leadership transitions are inevitable—but disruption doesn't have to be. This session explores how associations can move from reactive transitions to proactive continuity by addressing misaligned expectations, unclear roles, and competing visions. Drawing on real-world case studies and two decades of experience, Alison Teitelbaum will share practical strategies to strengthen board-executive partnerships, foster stability, and reduce disruption. Participants will leave with a clear roadmap for maintaining alignment, clarity, and momentum through change.

Navigating Burnout in the Association World



Maureen Dingus, CAE, COO, VA Society of CPAs

In the mission-driven, high-expectation world of associations, burnout has quietly become a common and costly reality. Juggling member needs, tight budgets, constant change and increasingly blurred work-life boundaries can wear down even the most passionate professionals. This session will explore the realities of burnout and offer practical strategies for prevention and intervention. We'll also examine professions with the highest levels of burnout and highlight how their associations are stepping up, providing training, resources, and support systems. Together, we'll unpack how early recognition and proactive culture shifts can lead to healthier individuals and stronger organizations.

Digging for Truth: Uncovering the Drivers of Membership & Retention



Pete Zimek, CAE, CEO, Novi AMS

Discover what truly drives membership: why people join—and why they stay. This session combines peer insights, research-based perspectives, and practical tools to help you conduct meaningful studies within your own association. Explore proven methodologies alongside cost-effective strategies to better understand member motivations. Walk away with the insights you need to make data-driven decisions that strengthen recruitment and retention.

CLOSING KEYNOTE

Choose to Rise: 5 Keys to Maintain Balance and Ignite Momentum



Janine Stange, Janine Stange LLC

For many association executives, leadership can feel like a never-ending game of whack-a-mole—membership pressures, staffing challenges, budget constraints, board transitions, and industry uncertainty all demanding attention at once. It's no wonder leaders can feel stuck or overwhelmed.

Choose to Rise invites leaders to pause, reset, and regain momentum by focusing on what's within their control—doing what you can, with what you have, where you are.

This keynote introduces the D.R.O.P.P.P. Method, a practical framework for navigating constant change with clarity and purpose: Decompress, Reconcile, Observe, Plan, Prepare, and Promise. Participants will also explore common Procrastination Profiles, uncovering how fear, self-doubt, and distraction quietly derail progress—and how to move forward anyway.

Grounded in the realities of association leadership, this session reminds AEs that while their industries may differ, their challenges are shared. Attendees will leave with fresh perspective, practical tools, and the confidence to lead with balance, creativity, and renewed momentum—right where they are. *Presented courtesy of PK Speakers Bureau.*

GENERAL SESSION

No Theory, Just Practice: Real AI Tactics Your Association Can Steal Today



Brian Chandler, APR, Founder & CEO

Commonwealth Public Relations & Marketing

This presentation explores how artificial intelligence is revolutionizing association operations, marketing, and member engagement. According to a recent survey, 75% of associations already use AI in marketing and communications, yet only 13% have formal AI policies in place. Many remain in early adoption stages, facing barriers like limited skills, time, and concerns over data privacy. Meanwhile, members (especially younger ones) are increasingly AI-savvy: 65% of Gen Z association members report using AI weekly, compared to just 18% of association staff saying their organizations leverage AI. In this session, attendees will learn how to deploy AI-powered personalization, predictive analytics for retention, automated content creation, and systems to scale engagement. Designed for leaders seeking actionable strategies, the program focuses on responsible adoption, balancing innovation with transparency and trust. Participants will leave ready to pilot AI initiatives aligned to mission goals and measurable ROI.



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Sparking Connection

by Sean Bott, VSAE Annual Conference Keynote Speaker

Come with me to 1984. You are a big-headed 3-year-old with green eyes and unruly blond hair. Your newly single father has decided to move you and your 4 siblings from Salt Lake City, Utah to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, because what else is there to do? After the almost 24 hours of travel, you step your bobble-headed self off of the flight into the boiling hot air. Disoriented, distracted, and drained, you put your tiny hand in your father's and step into the alien landscape around you.

After a few hours walking through the oppressive heat, overwhelmed by the strong perfumes and spices, loudspeakers sending words you don't understand bouncing off flat-roofed buildings, you and your father step into a baqala (Saudi version of 7-Eleven). You look around at the foreign offerings: spicy chips, Vimto drinks, and food items, none of it appealing, none of it like home. And then you see something that adds familiarity to the chaos. A small toy race car. When you push it along the ground, it shoots sparks out of its wheels. Just when you'd started to question the existence of the divine, behold this tiny miracle from white, English speaking, USA heaven. Overjoyed at this discovery, you turn to show your father, but instead you meet only the eyes of a woman dressed head to toe in black except her dark eyes. So, you do what any free range kid of the 80's does, you start to go up and down the aisles, expecting to see his mustached face any moment. When he's nowhere to be found, you grip the sparking racer, and rush out of the store, tears streaming freely down your hot white face. Eight thousand miles from home suddenly becoming very real, you race down the block among unfamiliar smells, heat, half-covered faces, and loudspeakers, looking for your father. Just when your tears were threatening to become shrieks of terrified panic, a light descends. There he is almost 3 blocks away, distractedly rubbing at his stubble, looking into the distance, having completely forgotten his youngest of 5 back at the Saudi 7-Eleven.

This feeling of disconnection, fear, and uncertainty is my first crystalized memory. And it's something many of us understand today. We feel alone, forgotten, and without a place to belong. As a child, I had little control over this experience. As an adult, these feelings still impact me as they do many of us. But now, there are ways we don't have to feel quite so alone, forgotten, or out of place.

As a mentalist, I specialize in creating powerful connection quickly, and in creating engagement and belonging that become the stuff of people's

personal legends. And on May 4th, 2026, I'll be bringing the entertainment, tools, and insights I've experienced in my journey from helping associations move from disconnection to belonging. The tools are simple, research supported, real world tested. They will help create stronger engagement, longer retention, and help continue to build the kind of associations others proselytize about.

In the words of Mother Theresa, "If we cannot find peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other."

Sean Bott appears courtesy of



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Crisis Preparedness Is No Longer Optional for Associations

by Brian Chandler, VSAE Annual Conference Breakout and General Session Speaker

Imagine this. You are hosting your association's annual conference. It is the second day, attendance is strong, sessions are underway. Then suddenly, reports begin to surface that an active shooter is in the hotel's common area. Attendees are texting staff, social media posts begin to circulate, and within minutes, local media is calling to confirm whether your event is connected.

In that moment, every decision matters. What do you say, who says it, and how quickly you respond will shape not only the immediate situation, but the long-term perception of your organization.

This is not a hypothetical exercise. It is the type of real-world scenario association leaders must be prepared to navigate.

Across the association landscape, the data shows a clear gap between risk and readiness. Nearly half of associations, 49.2 percent, do not have a plan for how to respond to a crisis, and 58.1 percent have not integrated crisis management into their broader strategic plans. Even more concerning,



28.7 percent of leaders say their organization's response would be ineffective if tested today.

At the same time, the risks facing associations are increasing. One in six associations has experienced a crisis within the past year. Many of these incidents are tied directly to core operations, including events, which can account for 30 to 40 percent of an association's annual revenue and can be disrupted or lost almost instantly.

Associations operate on trust, credibility and consistent engagement with members. A poorly handled crisis does not just create a temporary disruption, it can reshape perception of the organization and, in some cases, the entire industry it represents.

So what does effective crisis preparedness look like?

First, it begins before anything happens. The most effective organizations identify potential risks early, build a communications framework around those risks and ensure leadership teams are trained to respond. This is not a document that sits on a shelf. It is a working plan that aligns staff, board leadership and key stakeholders around roles, responsibilities and decision-making processes.

Second, it is about understanding how quickly a crisis unfolds. In today's environment, incidents are captured, shared and amplified in real time. Within minutes, a situation can move from an internal issue to a public narrative shaped by social media and media coverage. Once an incident occurs, there is an immediate information gap, followed quickly by public awareness and narrative formation.

That makes the first moments critical. The communications response in the first 30 minutes to several hours often determines the tone of the entire situation. Organizations that can quickly confirm facts, activate a response team, establish a clear spokesperson and issue a holding statement are far better positioned to maintain credibility and control.

Finally, strong crisis communication is rooted in clarity and empathy. The first message should prioritize safety and acknowledge the impact on those affected. From there, consistency matters. Speaking with one voice across leadership, staff and communications channels helps reduce confusion and reinforces trust.

I will be exploring these scenarios and practical frameworks in more detail during my session at the VSAE Annual Conference on May 4 in Williamsburg. The goal is simple: to ensure association leaders are not just reacting to crises, but prepared to lead through them.

Brian Chandler, APR, is the Founder & CEO of Commonwealth Public Relations & Marketing

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Choose to Rise: Decisions That Ignite Momentum

by Janine Stange, VSAE Annual Conference Keynote Speaker

What if the biggest thing standing between you and momentum isn't time, resources, or opportunity—but a decision?

Every day, professionals find themselves stuck in quiet moments of hesitation: waiting until the timing is right, until the pressure eases, until the circumstances improve. We tell ourselves when things settle down, then I'll take the next step. But what if that way of thinking is exactly what keeps momentum out of reach?

In this energizing keynote, *Choose to Rise: Decisions That Ignite Momentum*, audiences are challenged to rethink the stories they tell themselves about readiness, success, and forward motion. Through powerful storytelling and practical insight, this session explores how the most meaningful progress rarely begins with perfect conditions. It begins with a choice.

Momentum is not something that magically appears once everything is aligned. It is something that is created—often in the middle of uncertainty, pressure, and competing priorities. The individuals and organizations that move forward are rarely the ones with the easiest path. They are the ones willing to rise and take action before they feel completely ready.

This keynote dives into the small but powerful decisions that change trajectories. The kind that shift teams from stuck to moving, from reactive to intentional, from waiting to leading.

Audiences will explore the hidden ways hesitation shows up in everyday thinking, particularly through the familiar “when-then” mindset—the belief that when something changes, then progress will happen. But progress rarely waits for the perfect moment. It starts when someone decides to move anyway.

Along the way, participants will discover a practical framework for regaining clarity and forward momentum when challenges feel overwhelming. The approach is simple enough to apply immediately, yet powerful enough to reshape how individuals and teams respond to obstacles, setbacks, and uncertainty.

More than motivation, this session delivers perspective. Attendees leave with a renewed sense of ownership over the decisions that shape their momentum—both personally and professionally.

Because the truth is, momentum isn't reserved for extraordinary moments. It's built through everyday decisions.

And sometimes the most important one is simply this:

To rise.

Janine Stange appears courtesy of 





In today's rapidly evolving technological landscape, AI is reshaping industries worldwide, and the association industry is no exception. The VSAE AI Summit is designed to equip association professionals with the knowledge and tools to harness the power of AI, manage its risks, and ultimately, better serve their members.

Held at the VSCPA Learning & Innovation Center, this one-day immersive experience will delve into the practical applications of

AI, from enhancing operational efficiency to driving strategic decision-making. Attendees will gain insights from industry experts who will share their experiences and best practices in leveraging AI to address real-world challenges.

SCHEDULE

8-8:30 am	Coffee and Check-In
8:30-9:30 am	The State of AI: What Association Leaders Need to Know Now
9:30-11:15 am	From Curiosity to Capability: Building Your AI Strategy, Governance & Internal Policy
11:15-11:45 am	AI in Action: Quick Wins You Can Implement This Year
11:45 am-1:15 pm	Lunch
1:15-2:30 pm	Rooted, Not Rushed: Making Purpose-Driven AI Decisions
2:30-2:45 pm	Break
2:45-3:45 pm	Avoiding the Headlines: Legal Risks, Ethical Pitfalls & Compliance Issues
3:45-4:00 pm	Closing Takeaways: What To Do Next

REGISTER

Registration fee includes all educational sessions and lunch.

	EARLY By May 15	REGULAR After May 15
Member - Basic, Associate, Provisional	\$165	\$180
Member - Enhanced	\$150	\$165
Non-Member	\$190	\$205

Cancellation Policy

By Wednesday, May 6, 75% refund
By Wednesday, May 13, 50% refund

NO REFUNDS AFTER MAY 13

REGISTER AT [VSAE.ORG/AI-SUMMIT](https://vsaе.org/ai-summit)

Online Registration closes Wednesday, May 27 at Noon



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