



YOUR *association* PRESS

Special 2025 Annual Conference Issue



We welcome you to the 2025 VSAE Annual Conference at The Hotel Roanoke & Conference Center! We're delighted to host you in the heart of Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains as we unveil an exciting new chapter for our beloved landmark. With a \$14 million renovation now complete, our 327 guest rooms marry historic elegance with modern comfort, and we're proud to introduce the newly opened Spa at Hotel Roanoke—a peaceful retreat to elevate your stay located on the Health & Wellness Floor.

This year, we also celebrate a significant milestone: the 30th anniversary of our Conference Center, which opened in 1995, giving rise to The Hotel Roanoke & Conference Center as you know it today. This rebirth followed a challenging six-year closure from 1989 to 1995, when the hotel sat silent after nearly a century of service. The 1995 reopening, driven by community vision and dedication, transformed the property into a premier destination for gatherings like yours, breathing new life into its grand legacy.



We invite you to immerse yourself in all that this moment offers. Unwind with a drink at the 1882 Lobby Bar, where the ambiance of our storied past meets the comfort of today. Step into the AKA Speakeasy to explore a captivating history display, complete with vintage photographs and tales of notable guests that trace our journey through time. And just outside, the accessible, walkable downtown Roanoke—linked by an over-the-rail pedestrian bridge awaits with its charming shops, eateries, and cultural delights.

Your visit is more than a conference; it's an opportunity to connect, reflect, and experience a destination that honors its history while embracing a bold future. We're thrilled to share this special time with you and look forward to making this year's event unforgettable.

Matt Polansky, Sales Manager and Sandra Holt, Director of Sales
The Hotel Roanoke & Conference Center



On behalf of our partners at The Hotel Roanoke & Conference Center, we are delighted to welcome you to Virginia's Blue Ridge for the 2025 VSAE Annual Conference!

Whether you are here as an attendee, speaker, or one of our valued partners, we are thrilled to have you for what promises to be an engaging and insightful experience. This year's conference brings together friends, thought leaders, innovators, and professionals from association management in a destination that will elevate your experience.

During your stay, we invite you to explore our many outdoor adventures, including amazing hiking, biking, and paddling. Snap a selfie at the iconic Roanoke Star and meander the trail system on Mill Mountain. A short walk from The Hotel Roanoke, sample the vibrant culinary and nightlife scene of Downtown Roanoke. The Market District also boasts a great collection of local shops, boutiques, art galleries, and museums. So much to do, so little time!

For more recommendations on things to do, stop by the Visit VBR information table during the conference or check out our Visitor Information Center adjacent to The Hotel Roanoke.

Welcome to Virginia's Blue Ridge!

Landon Howard, President
Visit Virginia's Blue Ridge



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Welcome!



On behalf of the VSAE Board of Directors, I'm excited to welcome you to the 2025 Annual Conference at the historic Hotel Roanoke. With the incredible support of staff here at the "Grand Old Lady on the Hill" as well as Visit Virginia's Blue Ridge, this gathering is sure to be an incredible celebration of community, connection, and continued growth for our organization. Having attended this event every year for the past ten, I can personally attest to the sense of rejuvenation these few days together can provide.

This year, we've leaned into thoughtful strategic planning to ensure VSAE remains a sustainable, inclusive, and responsive organization, one that reflects the needs of both today's professionals and tomorrow's leaders. From evaluating our current offerings to exploring new events and formats, our aim is to provide greater value and engagement opportunities for all members. We sincerely appreciate the ways that so many of you have stepped forward to lend your time and talents, and it's made a real difference. Whether serving on committees, contributing to SIGs, or helping shape future programming, your voices and insights are helping steer the path ahead.

As you participate in this year's conference, I hope you'll take time to reflect on how far we've come, as well as where we're headed. This is a chance to learn, share, and reconnect with colleagues who understand the unique rewards and challenges of association leadership. We are especially grateful to our 2025 Partners and Annual Conference Sponsors, whose support is instrumental in making events like this possible. Your investment helps sustain the professional home we all count on.

Let these few days be an opportunity to explore new ideas, build lasting relationships, and recommit to the work that brings us all together. I'm so glad you're here!

Shannon McCabe, CAE
2024–2025 President
Virginia Society of Association Executives



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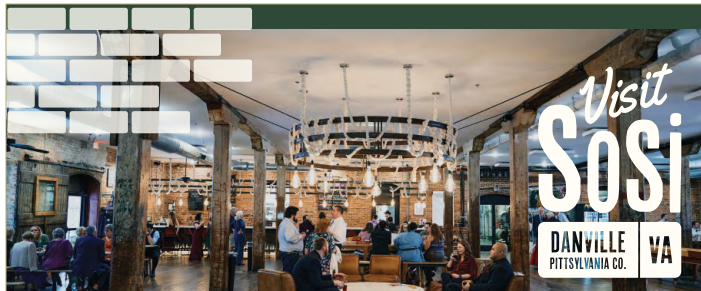
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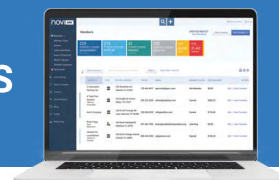
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**Thank you for joining
us at the beautiful
Hotel Roanoke &
Conference Center**



Sunday, May 4

Schedule subject to change.

12:00–4:00 pm	Pre-conference Activities
12:00–4:30 pm	ALV Session
5:15–6:00 pm	New Member and First-Time Attendee Mixer (invitation only)
6:00–7:30 pm	Opening Reception
7:30 pm	Dine on Your Own

Monday, May 5

7:00–8:15 am	Breakfast
8:15–8:30 am	Opening Remarks
8:30–9:30 am	OPENING KEYNOTE: THE BUCKET LIST LIFE
9:45–11:00 am	Breakout Sessions • Maximizing Membership Engagement through Strategic Marketing and Communications • The Value of Conducting an Association Competitive Analysis • Workforce Challenges Through a Dual Lens
11:15 am–12:45 pm	Luncheon, 2025–2026 Board Installation, ALV Graduation
1:00–2:15 pm	Breakout Sessions • Strategies for Successful Career Management • Building Stronger Together: Strategic Alliances for Association Success • Small Staff, Smart Tech?
2:30–3:30 pm	Breakout Sessions • High-Impact Meetings Without Breaking the Bank • Legal Considerations for an Association's Code of Ethics
3:30–4:30 pm	Shared Interest Group (SIG) Meetings
5:30–6:15 pm	President's Reception (invitation only)
6:30–7:30 pm	Pre-Dinner Reception
7:30–9:00 pm	Dinner
9:00 pm	Dessert and After Dinner Entertainment



Tuesday, May 6

8:00–9:00 am	Breakfast at Your Leisure
9:00–10:15 am	CLOSING KEYNOTE: UNSTOPPABLE COURAGE— SHATTERING LIMITATIONS AND DARING TO THRIVE
10:30–11:30 am	General Session Inspiring Bold Leadership & Creating Engaged Employees
11:30–11:45 am	Closing Remarks and 2026 Annual Conference Host and Venue Announcement

KEYNOTE & BREAKOUT SESSIONS

OPENING KEYNOTE

The Bucket List Life

*Kenyon Salo**

Get energized with Kenyon Salo, as he shares his three simple concepts of living "The Bucket List Life". During this highly energetic and engaging presentation, you will learn how to create phenomenal experiences, share powerful stories, and help others along the way.

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Maximizing Membership Engagement through Strategic Marketing and Communications

Whitney Meyerhoeffer, MPA, CAE

Kelsea Watson, CAE

In today's competitive landscape, associations need a robust membership strategy that prioritizes not just growth, but engagement and retention. During this session, we'll explore the critical connection between member engagement, strategic marketing, and effective communication, offering practical strategies and real world examples to maximize your impact.

The Value of Conducting an Association Competitive Analysis

Bruce Rosenthal

In today's dynamic environment, associations face intense competition for the attention and investment of sponsors, members, exhibitors, and advertisers. Gone are the days when associations were the sole source for networking, education, and industry connections. The rise of search engines, artificial intelligence, virtual meetings, social media, and online advertising has opened alternative pathways for stakeholders to connect, learn, and market. This session will equip association professionals with the tools and insights needed to understand the competitive landscape, prioritize areas for differentiation, and leverage findings to achieve greater impact and sustainability.

Workforce Challenges Through a Dual Lens

Patrick Glaser, M.A., MPA

In this interactive session, association executives will explore workforce challenges through a unique dual lens, examining how labor market disruptions impact both association operations and their represented industries. Through expert insights, real-world case studies, and facilitated peer discussions, participants will gain a comprehensive understanding of today's most pressing workforce concerns and their cascading effects across different sectors.



Strategies for Successful Career Management

Jennifer McCluskey, PCC, M.Ed.

In this workshop, we will uncover the essential components of successful career management, including Professional Values Identification, Iterative Self-Discovery, Personal Brand Management, Effective Networking, Expanding Your Career Comfort Zone, Agile Career Pathing. This workshop incorporates interactive discussion, opportunities for self-reflection, and activities that will enable participants to leave with a tangible action plan, measurable next steps, and additional resources to help them immediately start using these life-long skills and achieve amazing results in their careers and lives.

Building Stronger Together: Strategic Alliances for Association Success

Dorothy Deng

Susan Park, PhD, CAE

Bruce Whitehurst

As the association landscape continues to evolve, strategic alliances have emerged as a powerful tool for organizations to enhance their impact and better serve their members. This session will explore the various types of partnerships between associations, including affiliations, joint ventures, and mergers.

Small Staff, Smart Tech?

Moir Edwards, MS, CAE

Erin Trost

Gain the knowledge and tools to develop a robust technology strategy for your small association and lay out an implementation plan. We'll explore key considerations such as identifying and adopting new technologies, aligning technology with your organization's mission, developing a realistic technology budget, and streamlining processes with technology.

Hackathon: High-Impact Meetings Without Breaking the Bank

Tiffany Brown

Feel like the cost of hosting a meeting seems to go up by the day and your dollars are already stretched thin? You're not the only one. Join us for a hackathon that will look at finding new ways to have high-impact meetings that your members can afford to attend. This session will be fast-paced and interactive as we work through topics like F&B, AV and meeting space.

Legal Considerations for an Association's Code of Ethics

Mark Carlos Franco

Cindy Ziegler

Does your association code of ethics or professional conduct include ethical principles from the profession that the association represents? This session will discuss what types of ethical misconduct may be covered by a code of ethics or professional conduct and the requirements under which that misconduct may be disciplined by an association.

CLOSING KEYNOTE

Unstoppable Courage - Shattering Limitations and Daring to Thrive

*Dima Ghawi**

A Middle Eastern woman, born into a world where obedience is survival, is given a path to follow. It is not hers, but it is the only one allowed. To challenge it is unthinkable. To escape it is impossible. Or—she can risk everything to break free. Dima Ghawi made that choice. She walked away from the only life she had ever known, sacrificing family, security, and identity to forge an entirely new existence. With gripping storytelling, raw vulnerability, and relatable insights, Dima takes the audience inside the defining moments of her journey.

GENERAL SESSION

Inspiring Bold Leadership & Creating Engaged Employees

*Dima Ghawi**

Employees in healthy cultures thrive. These cultures are created and passed down, inherited by the next generation of employees. The strongest leaders know to focus on a long-term strategy with an emphasis on corporate culture health for future generations to sustain and thrive within. Dima will share how organizations can cultivate healthy and thriving organizational cultures that attract and retain top talent.

*Provided courtesy of PK Speakers Bureau.



Flying High—How to Live a Bucket List Life

by Kenyon Salo, Keynote Speaker at VSAE's Annual Conference

I knew that it would go one of two ways.

Either it would be the greatest, most daring and courageous sporting success of my life... or the NFL would cut to commercial because things had gone horribly wrong. That was the mental challenge circling around in my head over and over again — much like the plane we were flying in 5000 feet above the Denver Broncos Stadium as kickoff approached.

Ever since I had learned about the Broncos Skydive team, it had been at the very top of my bucket list. With 15 years in the sport and over 4000 skydives at the time, I had an eager desire to be on the most prestigious skydive demonstration team in the world.

It had all started many months prior when I went to the owner of the Drop Zone in Denver and said, "Hey, what do I have to do to be on the team?"

"You're going to have to train."

I replied, "OK!"

"You're going to have to be here for every game."

I boldly proclaimed, "Done deal!" And followed it up with, "What else do I have to do?"

Then he got really serious and told me,

"You have to be able to land perfectly every single time no questions asked — no matter what the conditions are. You need to have the ability to handle lots of turbulence, along with navigating the crowd noise, the pressure of executing this demo... time and time again with absolute precision."

Unable to contain my excitement, I exclaimed, "I'm up for the challenge!"

I trained all summer long. Jump after jump. Practice after practice. Perfect landing after perfect landing into the open area at the Drop Zone.

About a third of the way through the NFL season I was given the opportunity to practice diving into the empty football stadium. That in itself was simply amazing. But the real goal had not yet been achieved.

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Each Sunday that the Broncos played at home, I sat patiently waiting to get the call and chance to jump into the game. Just like when Tom Brady sat on the bench behind Drew Bledsoe, patiently waiting for a chance to show the world that he would be the greatest of all time. (Sorry for the reference, Broncos fans.) I knew that one of those weeks I was going to get the go ahead, the opportunity I had trained my whole life for, the chance to have coach "put me in the game!"

GETTING MY SHOT

Then the text came, "Hey...be ready and at the DZ (Drop Zone) on Sunday by 11 am...bring your full uniform!"

I feverishly texted back, "I get to jump into the next game?"

He responded simply, "Yep, you're ready now."

Sunday came, and I loaded into the aircraft with the other team members. It took off and we had a quick flight to the stadium. The Twin Otter Aircraft circled the stadium for about fifteen minutes prior to kickoff, my nervousness compounding with every minute that passed. There are 70,000 people down in the stands and I know the gravity of the situation.

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> *continued from page 7*

At this point I'm calming myself down by listening for the countdown call times. The pilot shouts, "Ten minutes!" and then — what seemed like 30 seconds later — he shouted, "Five minutes!"

When he makes the "Two minutes!" call, the plane circles around and starts on its final path directly over the stadium. The green light turns on and the door is opened up. We are good to go, knowing we only have three minutes to land on the field. The NFL runs a tight ship and we certainly can't be the cause of a delay for the kickoff.

The first jumper exits the plane. The second jumper follows right behind. Then the third and the fourth. I'm the fifth jumper. As soon as I'm out the plane, I deploy my parachute and it opens up perfectly on heading.

I scream, "Yeah!"

That's what I say every single time my parachute opens — "Yeah!"

The five of us quickly find each other and move into our formation slots above the stadium. It's at this point when we're up there we can hear the 70,000 fans screaming and cheering! We

can hear all the energy billowing up into the sky from the packed stadium below.

Now, what I don't know is happening down on the field is that at the very same moment the PA Announcer notices there's five jumpers in the air.

He quickly radios and he says, "There are five jumpers but I only have names for four. What's the fifth guy's name?"

The ground crew confusingly responds back with "Uh, that's Kenyon."

The PA radios the crew again and says, "Great that we have a first name, but I need a last name to announce him correctly."

The ground crew chimes back, "We just know him as Kenyon at the Drop Zone...sorry that's all we have."

The PA announcer frustratingly says, "All right, I'll figure something out."

As we continued circling the stadium we must be very aware of the cables that crisscross the stadium 8 times. We have to be very careful of not just the field goal cables, but also the cable cam cables and we have to dive through them,

mission impossible style. If one of us makes a mistake, they're going to have to hold the NFL game...the thing we had to avoid at all costs.

At this point the first jumper makes his turn into the stadium at a high rate of speed. His setup turn sends him flying across the upper deck and down onto the field at speeds nearing 60 mph.

Next, the second jumper makes his 270 degree turn and fires down into the stadium as the crowd erupts in loud cheers. The third and fourth jumpers do the same, with raving thunder from the crowd. Now it's my turn and I'm setting up and getting ready. Finally, I initiate my turn to pick up speed and dive towards the crowd.

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE

As I'm now diving down towards the stands at 60 mph I see a guy with a hot dog and a beer and he's like, "Yeah!", I look at him and I yell back, "Yeah!" in turn. I continue flying and air surfing down the upper deck and then the lower deck. Through all the cables and then a quick right turn to go down the field. Like a kick returner breaking through the coverage and finding daylight, I am crossing the hash marks at full speed.

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Congratulations!

to the Association Leadership Virginia Class of 2025!



Shattering Limitations & Daring to Thrive

by Dima Ghawi, Keynote Speaker at VSAE's Annual Conference

"Do you see this pure, perfect glass?"

My grandmother's words echo through her kitchen in Jordan, the heart of the Middle East. I am five years old, and I stare at the vase she holds with wide eyes.

"A girl is just like this clear glass." Her voice is stone. "If the vase gets cracked for any reason, you can never fix it or glue it back. It will always be seen as cracked." My grandmother raises an eyebrow. "And who would want a cracked vase?"

Her stern eyes meet mine. "That is the one we throw in the trash."

This story has been passed down for generations: the glass vase is a girl's reputation, where any scratch is ruin beyond repair. A crack in my vase would destroy my family's reputation in the community.

And so I grew up believing that the most important task in my life was to protect my vase—to protect my reputation by following, obeying, by not having an identity and by not taking risks. To do any of that would be to crack my vase.

From that forced silence, today I live the life I was taught I would never get to have. I am living with a loud purpose! I work with organizations around the globe to help them give voice to individuals that are silenced in corporate cultures—as I was in my own home.

The journey between, from the moment I saw the vase in my grandmother's hands when I was five years old to the woman I am today, came with painful consequences, harsh setbacks, but also valuable lessons.

I learned that I am not the only person with a vase. In fact, everyone has a vase—the fear of mistakes, the terror of being judged, and the aspiration for perfection. It is the negative voice in the back of our mind that tells us, You aren't good enough, smart enough, successful enough, or the right height or shape. We allow these limitations to inhibit us, not realizing that we have the power to smash them all along. These internal limitations are global, regardless of our backgrounds, cultures, genders, and identities. They impact us personally and professionally. We carry our vases into the corporate world every single day.

In the workplace, vases often feel like unspoken rules: the silent expectation to conform, to not speak up or challenge the norm. Have you ever been told—or ever said—"Well, that's the way things have always been done" or—even worse!—"If it ain't broke, don't fix it?" Organizations have vases, and those vases are these inherited perspectives that limit us as leaders, limit our employees, and limit our entire work culture.



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I'm at the 50, the 40, the 20, the 10, and I just put my feet down...I hear the PA announcer say, "And our fifth and final jumper is... Kennnnnnnn-Yawnnnnnn!"

LIVING YOUR OWN BUCKET LIST LIFE

I know that a lot of people might look at this story and have some unsettling feelings about it — fear, reckless endangerment, or just extreme craziness to name a few.

For others it could be the opposite — admiration. They could see the act of jumping out of an airplane onto the field of an NFL Game as one of courage and boldness.

In reality, the most difficult and bold part of the journey of 4,000+ skydives that ultimately led to me joining the most elite skydive demo team in the world came down to a single, very important decision.

This decision is one that I recognize many people struggling with at every single event that I speak at.

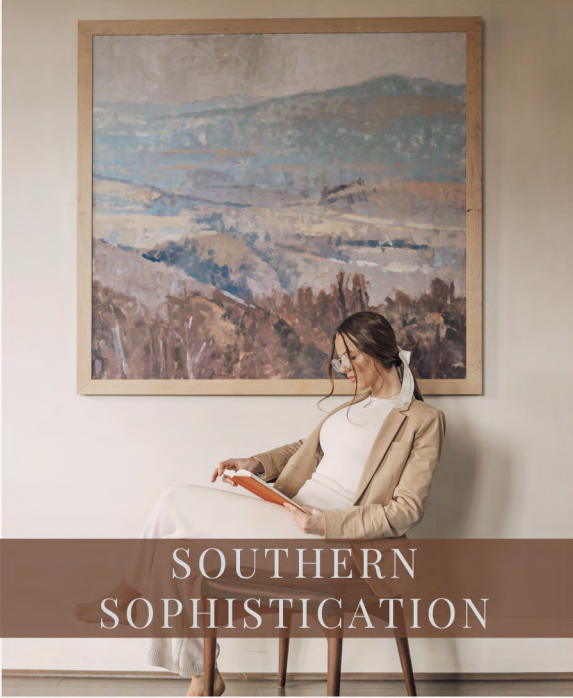
That is the decision to create a new experience and simply take the first step towards it. Without the first skydive there can't be a 4,000th skydive. It takes that first step of courage that leads you to the next, and then the next, and then the next.

Our society has never been softer. It's never been easier to stay safe in your comfort zone. But it's a trap that you must be courageous enough to escape!

To become the best version of ourselves we must be bold. We must understand that we start out at our worst, but that we can become our best if we have the discipline and dedication. Every master was once a disaster. Think about that again. Every master was once a disaster.

What you eventually recognize with age, experience, and boldness, is that the biggest thing separating people who are living fulfilling lives from those who feel desperate and trapped is a willingness to do things that you are bad at or afraid of. In the process of doing those things, you come to understand that fear is just an obstacle to fulfillment and growth. What's more, you witness that building a new skill or hobby from scratch is the best method we humans have of attaining genuine confidence.

Now go be bold and take the first step of many in a new experience. You may be surprised where it actually leads you in this great life.



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Join Kenyon for his opening keynote,
The Bucket List Life.

Courtesy of 

Connect with Kenyon on the
latest episode of VSAE's podcast,
ConneXions at vsae.podbean.com

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When outdated mindsets no longer serve us, we must leave them behind.

Let's question the limitations that have been holding us back! Through our answers, we come to understand new ways of being. In the workplace, we get to improve how we lead our organization and create a culture of courage where everyone can bring their unique truths and creativity to work.

If I had the chance to talk to my grandmother again, knowing what I know and living what I've lived, I would tell her that the beauty is in the cracks. The beauty is in imperfection—in the experiences we have and the lessons we learn from them.

What an amazing gift that is to give each other and the next generation!



Join Dima for her closing keynote, *Unstoppable Courage – Shattering Limitations and Daring to Thrive* and her general session, *Inspiring Bold Leadership & Creating Engaged Employees*.

Courtesy of



Get detailed session descriptions, learning objectives, presenter bios, connect with other attendees, and engage on social media on the official VSAE mobile app, Engagefully.



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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	Keynote: The Future is Now: How AI Is Changing Associations <i>Nick Serfass, FAIA, CAE, Chief Executive Officer, RVA Technology Council</i>
9:40–10:55 am	Navigating AI's Legal Pitfalls and Risks <i>Betsy Davis, Partner, Labor and Employment Law Group, Whiteford Law</i> <i>Slaven Jesic, Counsel, Whiteford Law</i>
11 am–12:15 pm	Managing the Data Deluge <i>Katherine Bayless, CAE, AVP, Data & Analytics, National Council of Architectural Registration Boards</i>
12:15–1:05 pm	Lunch and Learn
1:10–2:25 pm	Building an AI-Ready Workforce <i>Christina Lewellen, MBA, CAE, President and CEO, ATLIS</i>
2:30–3:45 pm	Creating Your AI Policy <i>Rick Bawcum, CAE, Founder and CEO, Cimatri</i>

REGISTER

Registration fee includes all educational sessions and lunch.

Member—Basic, Associate, Provisional	\$165	\$180
Member—Enhanced	\$150	\$165
Non-Member	\$190	\$205

Cancellation Policy

By Wednesday, May 2, 75% refund

By Wednesday, May 14, 50% refund

NO REFUNDS AFTER MAY 14



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