



— VIRGINIA SOCIETY of —  
ASSOCIATION EXECUTIVES

YOUR

association

PRESS

November/December 2025



## 2025 Awards Luncheon & Silent Auction

Friday, December 5  
Hilton Richmond Hotel  
& Spa Short Pump

Join us this December 5 as our association community comes together to recognize this year's recipients of VSAE's Awards of Excellence and celebrate the holiday season!

Looking to snag a great gift for a loved one, friend, or yourself while also supporting a good cause? Proceeds from the silent auction will benefit VSAE's education fund, which supports VSAE's ability to provide a wide range of professional development programs for members throughout the year, and the Richmond Animal Care and Control Foundation. As the sole open-admission animal shelter in the City, RACC tirelessly tends to the needs of over 3,000 animals annually, requiring urgent care.

In addition to the Silent Auction and in the spirit of this giving season, we will collect non-perishable food items to donate to FeedMore. Bring a couple of cans or boxes from your pantry with you on the day of the event.

Learn more and register at [vsae.org/alsa25](https://vsae.org/alsa25).

## 2026 Virginia Political Outlook Luncheon



Kick off the new year with VSAE's most popular seminar! Join fellow association leaders on Friday, January 9 at The Omni Richmond for an insightful look at the political landscape with Dr. Bob Holsworth, one of Virginia's most respected political analysts and the Managing Principal of DecideSmart.

Dr. Holsworth will provide:

- Exclusive insights into the upcoming Virginia General Assembly session
- A forward-looking analysis of the 2025 statewide elections
- Discussion on how legislative developments and political shifts could impact Virginia's associations and their members

Don't miss this opportunity to stay informed, connect with colleagues, and prepare your organization for what's ahead in 2026 and beyond.

### DON'T MISS OUT!

#### AWARDS LUNCHEON & SILENT AUCTION

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 5

Hilton Richmond Hotel  
& Spa-Short Pump

9:30 am

Past Presidents Breakfast

10:30 am

Registration Opens

10:30-11:45 am

Reception, 50/50 Raffle, and  
Silent Auction (Baskets Only)

11:45 am

Luncheon Room Opens

12:00 pm

Silent Auction Ends and Awards  
Luncheon & Live Auction begins

REGISTER AT

[vsae.org/calendar](https://vsae.org/calendar)

### UPCOMING EVENTS

WEBINAR:

AMS Selection Simplified

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 3

1:30-2:30 pm

2026 VIRGINIA POLITICAL  
OUTLOOK LUNCHEON

FRIDAY, JANUARY 9

The Omni Richmond

VIEW UPCOMING EVENTS AT  
[VSAE.ORG/CALENDAR](https://vsae.org/calendar)



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# Thank You For The Warm Welcome

In my first month at the helm of VSAE, I've been struck by how welcoming, engaged, and genuinely connected this community is. While it's clear that many longstanding friendships and partnerships run deep here, members could not be more enthusiastic about bringing newcomers—myself included—into the fold. At my first Seminar and Luncheon in November, volunteers from our Membership Community stepped in right away to meet new members at check-in, share a table at lunch, and serve as friendly guides throughout the event and beyond.

There is so much about VSAE that makes this organization special—the steady opportunities to connect in person, the cost-effective CAE resources, the wealth of expertise across our membership, and the number of volunteers who take real ownership of the Society's success. And something I've quickly come to appreciate is just how dedicated and collaborative our Associate Members and Partners are alongside our Association Professionals. It's clear they are invested in advancing VSAE's mission to be the best at making associations the best. I look forward to finding meaningful ways to recognize their contributions while continuing to create new value for them.

As I've been getting to know members across the Commonwealth, one theme keeps coming up: VSAE should serve as a place to experiment. I'm eager to try new ideas, whether that means fresh session topics, new ways of bringing people together through Committees or Shared Interest Groups (SIGs), piloting different approaches at our trade show, or finding ways to engage more members of our association's staff as members and event attendees.

I'm also excited to build on the momentum created earlier this year around Professional

Development. My goal is to offer practical, applicable learning—programming that members can take back to their own organizations and put to work right away. I'm already seeing progress through our Professional Development Committee's role in reviewing proposals and guiding selections. Just as encouraging is the growing interest from our Association Professionals who want to share their expertise on stage.

**“I look forward to building the next chapter of VSAE with all of you.”**

Another key priority in our Strategic Plan is statewide engagement. As a native of Northern Virginia, I'm especially enthusiastic about building on the strong foundation Terry and our volunteers have created there. While expanding our reach will take focused effort, it's clear that the demand exists for the kind of community and learning VSAE provides. We'll be working on ways to meet that demand. Stay tuned for new programming, opportunities to connect, and ways to strengthen relationships in the year ahead.

In closing, thank you for the warm welcome. I'm grateful to be part of this community, and I'm excited for what we will accomplish together. The work ahead is energizing, and I look forward to building the next chapter of VSAE with all of you.



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[VISITHAMPTON.COM/MEETINGS](http://VISITHAMPTON.COM/MEETINGS)



# Get to Know David Walsh, VSAE's New Executive Director

## Q: How long have you been in the association industry?

15 years – 14 years with SNAC International, which is the global association for the snack industry, and a couple association internships before that at InfoComm International, which then was the association for the A/V industry.

## Q: How did you become involved in the association industry?

Growing up in the DC area and with my mom being an association 'lifer', the industry was all around me. I had the chance to intern with her associations a couple of times, and after graduating from college, I looked for a job in the association space in the D.C. area.

## Q: Do/Did you have a mentor? If so, what's a lesson they've taught you that you'd want to pass on to others?

One mentor had a motto that went, "Everything we do should benefit the members, and if it doesn't, we shouldn't be doing it." It's been helpful to step back and evaluate activities and offerings through this lens.

Another mentor during my career always encouraged us to get out in front of potential issues and not wait for them to find us. Whether that's giving stakeholders a heads up, checking ideas with Board members first before starting an open-ended discussion, she always encouraged me to be prepared for any situation.

Another phrase that she instilled in me was "lift and shift" – always be on the lookout for things that are working elsewhere and see how we can incorporate them to provide value for members.

## Q: If you could advise young professionals in the industry, what would it be?

No matter what role you're in – sales, finance, membership, meetings, etc. – work hard to not only grow your professional network, but keep it fresh. Building and

maintaining relationships have been critical to my growth in the association world as well as in my previous association's industry (the snack industry). It's always easier to ask for a referral or sponsorship when you have a strong relationship in place.

## Q: What are some of your primary focus areas as Executive Director of VSAE?

As I'm getting started, I'm focused on how we can deliver the strongest possible value to both our association professional and associate members across VSAE's mission of connecting, learning, and leading. Listening to what our members want to learn about and shaping programming and structured networking opportunities that respond directly to those needs will be central to boosting engagement.

I also want to continue clarifying and communicating the value of VSAE membership, including core benefits like affordable CAE credits, meaningful speaking opportunities for members, and the sense of community that sets VSAE apart. A key part of our strategic plan is expanding engagement across the Commonwealth, including Northern Virginia, and I believe we have a real opportunity to differentiate ourselves in a crowded space. We offer a wide range of programs that touch nearly every part of association management, so making that value proposition clear will be important as we work to attract new members.

In my first few weeks, I've also seen how passionate and creative our members are, and I'm eager to partner with these leaders to test new ideas and see what works best for VSAE's future. Whether it's fresh session topics, new ways to bring people together, or opportunities to involve more staff-level professionals, there's a lot we can build on.

Coming from a background in membership development and sponsorship, I'm equally committed to ensuring our Partners continue to find real value in being part of this



community. They play a vital role in helping VSAE thrive, and I want to deepen their connection to our mission while recognizing the contributions they make to the Society's success.

## Q: What are your hobbies/favorite activities outside of work?

My wife and I have four children, ages six and under, so it's all about getting to the park, playgrounds, creek etc. When feeling brave, we'll go hiking (proud to say we've hauled all the kids up a mountain a couple times). I enjoy playing golf, basketball, grilling, working out, reading, and watching DC and UVA sports. During the summer, we'll go down to my in-laws' cabin on Lake Gaston a few times, where I'm learning to wakeboard.

## Q: What's on your music playlist?

I listen to a little bit of everything – rock / soul / blues (Alabama Shakes, Grateful Dead, CCR, Allman Brothers, Tedeschi Trucks, Led Zeppelin, Eric Clapton, Johnny Cash), Irish music (The Chieftains, Young Dubliners, The Irish Rovers), Country (Tyler Childers, Toby Keith, Zach Bryan, Alabama), and many more. Oh yeah, how could I forget – Frozen 1 and 2, Moana, Sonic, etc., due to the kids' requests (okay, my wife and I jam out to those sometimes, too).

## Q: What are your favorite sports teams?

Commanders, Wizards, Nationals, Capitals – and UVA, Go 'Hoos!

# Abby's Leadership Lesson Series



During my opening remarks at the 2025 Annual Conference, I shared six personal leadership lessons that have shaped my path. Throughout this year, I'll be spotlighting each one here in our newsletter, with the hope that they'll offer insight, encouragement, and a fresh perspective for your own leadership journey.

## Leadership Lesson #4: The Power of Community—Especially Now

As the holiday season approaches, our calendars fill quickly with year-end deadlines, family commitments, and the ever-growing to-do lists that come with both. It's a joyful time—but also one that can feel overwhelming. In moments like these, the strength of our professional community becomes more important than ever.

One of the greatest gifts we have as association leaders is the network we've built through VSAE. These are not just peers—they are trusted colleagues who understand the unique challenges we face and are often just a phone call or email away with insight, encouragement, or a helping hand.

Leadership doesn't always mean having all the answers. Sometimes, it means knowing when to lean on others. Whether you're navigating a complex board issue, juggling competing priorities, or simply needing a fresh perspective, don't hesitate to reach out. Trust in the relationships you've built within this community. We are stronger—and more effective—when we support one another.

This season, I encourage you to make space for connection. Check in with a fellow member. Ask for help if you need it. Offer your time or expertise if you can. These small acts of leadership and generosity ripple far beyond the moment—and they remind us that we're never in this work alone.

Wishing you a season of warmth, balance, and meaningful connection.

## PLAN WITH PURPOSE. MEET IN SOSI.

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### COTTONTAIL WEDDINGS & EVENTS





# VSAE CEO & Senior Staff Retreat: A Thoughtful, Energizing Gathering for Virginia's Association Leaders



*Top row: Doug Barger, Hilton Norfolk The Main; Scot McRoberts, VA CEOs; Pete Zimek, Novi AMS network during the Monday evening reception. Facilitated roundtables encouraged attendees to explore topics like member engagement and the role of AI. The Retreat mixed facilitated learning with peer exchanges, capitalizing on the sense of community that makes VSAE so unique. Bottom row: Charlottesville Mayor Juandiego Wade welcomed attendees to the city on Monday morning. Lowell Aplebaum, Professional Facilitator and CEO of Vista Cova pushed attendees to stretch their thinking about what the future could hold for their associations. The Retreat brought over 35 executives together, representing industries like construction, finance, banking, architecture and more.*

More than 35 CEOs, senior staff members, and industry partners convened in Charlottesville for this year's VSAE CEO & Senior Staff Retreat—an intimate, high-engagement program designed to give leaders space to think strategically, share openly, and learn from one another. Held at The Draftsman, Autograph Collection, the retreat brought together association executives from a wide range of sectors including construction, finance, regulatory affairs, banking, architecture, and more, underscoring the breadth and strength of Virginia's association community.

Over a day and a half, participants stepped back from the demands of daily operations and dug into the key issues shaping the association landscape. Facilitator Lowell Aplebaum, EDD, FASAE, CAE, CPF, CEO of Vista Cova, guided the group through conversations that blended foresight, leadership development, and collaborative inquiry. His message—that associations don't need to know everything, but are often where knowledge is generated—resonated throughout the program.

Roundtable discussions and peer exchanges created opportunities for authentic connection and real problem-solving. Leaders explored topics ranging from member engagement and organizational storytelling to risk tolerance, innovation, board development, and the role of AI. Several attendees remarked that the mix of facilitated learning and peer dialogue was especially impactful.

One participant shared that the retreat offered “valuable insights into big-picture thinking and leadership with excellent networking—wonderful VSAE event!” Another noted the “openness in sharing” among peers, while others praised the balance of presentations and group work, saying it allowed them to dive deeper into issues they “don't often have time to consider.” The peer-to-peer portion of the program received equally high marks, with one attendee calling it “the best part of the event.”

The retreat also sparked tangible next steps for many executives. Attendees cited plans to enhance board orientation processes, explore

AI applications, revisit volunteer structures, and adopt new facilitation techniques to strengthen engagement within their organizations.

We extend our sincere thanks to our Partners for making this program possible, and to The Draftsman for their warm hospitality and attentive service throughout the event.

## Looking Ahead to 2026

Planning is already underway for next year. The 2026 CEO & Senior Staff Retreat will take place November 16–17 at the Embassy Suites by Hilton on the Cavalier Resort in Virginia Beach.

This program is a prime opportunity for CEOs to bring members of their senior leadership teams—an investment in professional growth, strategic alignment, and building the next generation of association leaders.

We look forward to gathering again next fall for another meaningful and energizing experience.



# YOUR PICKS FOR '26!



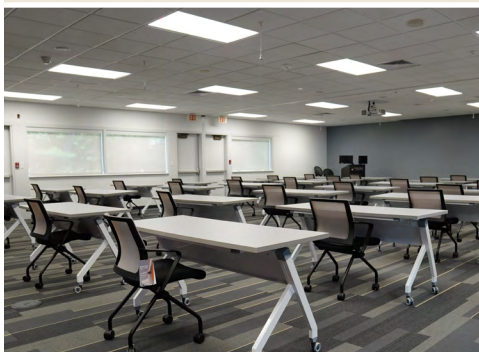
An opportunity for professional Meeting Planners to bond as they share best practices and experience together the newest ideas in event planning.

**Meeting Planner Summit**  
March 18-19  
The Virginian



The entire membership comes together for high-caliber educational sessions, networking at receptions and a banquet, and fun activities in the local area.

**Annual Conference**  
May 3-5  
The Williamsburg Lodge



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**AI Summit**  
June 3  
VA Society of CPAs



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**AMC Summit**  
July 14  
Newport News Marriott at City Center



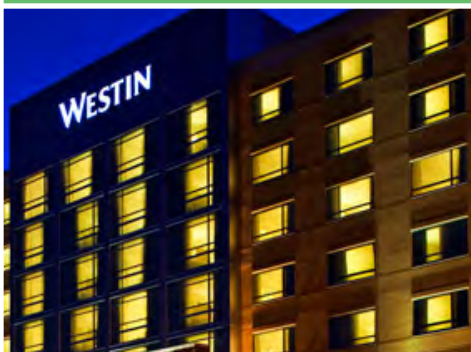
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**CEO & Senior Staff Retreat**  
November 16-17  
Embassy Suites by Hilton  
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**Awards Luncheon & Silent Auction**  
December 4  
The Westin Richmond



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VSAE programs meet the professional development requirements to earn and maintain the CAE credential.



# Report: Meeting Planners Focused on Costs, Engagement

by Mark Athitakis, contributing editor for *Associations Now*

The American Express Global Business Travel finds meeting planners leaning on AI and new formats to increase appeal.

Meeting planners are optimistic going into 2026, according to a new survey, though concerned about rising costs and delivering engaging experiences across increasingly diverse attendee groups.

The 2026 Global Meetings and Events Forecast [PDF], released last month by American Express Global Business Travel, is based on a survey of 601 global meeting planners conducted in July 2025. Overall, respondents are feeling good about the health of the sector, with 85 percent saying they are “optimistic” about meetings in 2026—the highest percentage since the height of the pandemic.

The report credits a more stable meeting environment for the optimism. “The meetings sector [is] settling into its new normal,” the report said. “We’re seeing greater consistency when it comes to strategy and meeting management.”

Moreover, many meeting planners are looking at the next year with a growth mindset: 47 percent of planners said that they intend to increase the number of conferences featuring tradeshows, for instance. And planners have grown more comfortable building generative AI into their meeting-design process, with 34 percent saying they intend to use it to create concepts and themes, and 28 percent say they’ll use it to track attendee engagement.

Engagement, in fact, presents one of the biggest challenges to planners, according to the survey. The report notes that meetings now must accommodate five distinct generations, each with their own learning and engagement preferences. In response, the report says, planners are looking at more dynamic options: “Sessions are shorter, allowing for longer networking breaks. Increasingly, attendees want events where they can be active participants and create human connections.”



## “42 percent of meeting planners say attendees want more interactive sessions.”

The report quoted Rebecca DeLuca, vice president of destination sales at the Las Vegas Convention & Visitors Authority (LVCVA), who said, “Many successful events now design micro-communities – tailored spaces and experiences shaped by audience, budget, and goals – to make sure every generation feels included and engaged.”

To that end, substantial percentages of meeting planners say attendees want more interactive sessions (42 percent), more social and network activities (40 percent), and more personalized experiences (37 percent).

Complicating the meeting environment further is cost. Thirty-eight percent of respondents cited cost as their biggest challenge, and 30 percent said reducing costs is a key focus in the coming year. And planners are exploring creative ways to avoid passing those costs on to the attendee, with 35 percent of planners saying they’re looking for increased sponsorship opportunities, and also pursuing more bespoke opportunities

such as exclusive access to C-suite leaders and influencers.

Planners are also factoring in the cost of travel to the meeting location, with 37 percent of planners saying “ease of travel and transportation to location for attendees” as a key factor in their plans for the year ahead.

Emma Bason, Director of Global Venue Sourcing Amex GBT Meetings & Events, said in the report that planners will have to thread the needle of experience, content, and location. “Attendees want to walk away feeling like they’ve done something that wasn’t just for work – that they’ve come away with the story of being here,” she said. “I’ve tried this’. We did this. We felt like this. I want to go back.”

*This article originally appeared on ASAEcenter.org. Reprinted with permission. Copyright ASAE: The Center for Association Leadership (November 2025), Washington, DC.*



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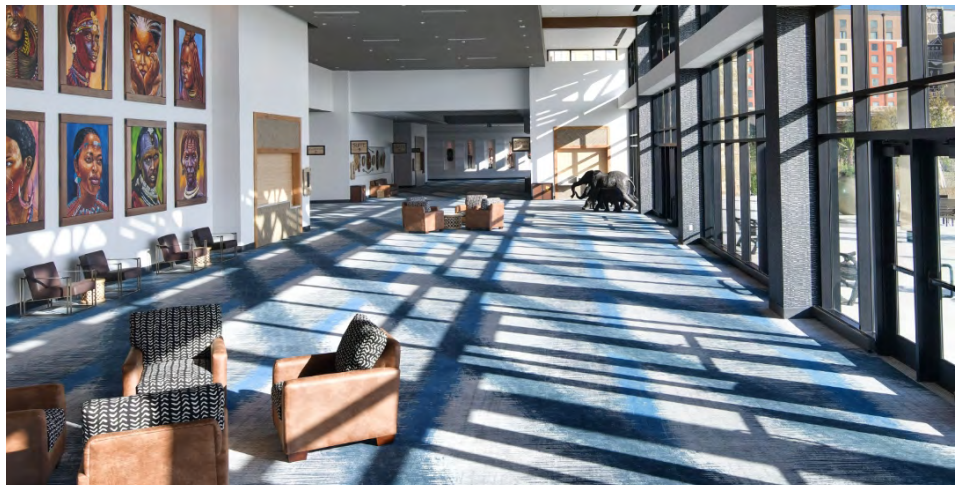
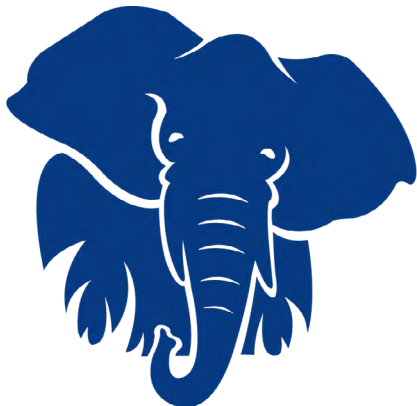
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## MEMBER NEWS



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**Bryce Marshall** | *Ruggles Service Corporation* | *Richmond*  
**Jessica Lamberty Pinto** | *Easter Associates* | *Richmond*

### NEW ASSOCIATES

**Hannah Coats** | *Hilton Norfolk The Main* | *Norfolk*  
**Katherine Goodwin** | *Visit Newport News* | *Newport News*  
**Danielle Hodnett** | *The Virginian Hotel* | *Lynchburg*  
**Samantha Johnson** | *Visit Staunton* | *Staunton*  
**Lauren Kidwell** | *Raffa Investment Advisers* | *Washington, DC*  
**Susie Trimbell** | *Massanutten Resort* | *Massanutten*

### MEMBERS ON THE MOVE

**Allison Knapp** is now the Director of Sales Marketig with  
**Newport News Marriott at City Center**

**Melinda Sweeney** is now the Senior Sales Manager  
with **Delta Hotels Virginia Beach Waterfront**



### CONGRATULATIONS

VSAE president, **Abby Tammen**, CEO of the **Charlottesville Area Association of Realtors**, has been honored with the 2025 Virginia Women in Leadership Award, sponsored by Virginia Business. This honor highlights the strategic insight, collaborative spirit, and professionalism she brings to her team, peers, and the many association groups she engages with. Abby's consistently positive, solutions-focused approach—regardless of the challenge—continues to inspire those around her.

## Gain Knowledge While Earning CAE Credits

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