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# FORUM

**THE SECRET  
TO BUILDING**  
a Strong,  
Reliable  
Professional  
Network

2024 | SPRING ISSUE | V1110

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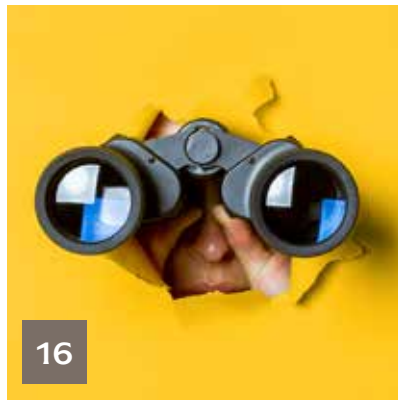
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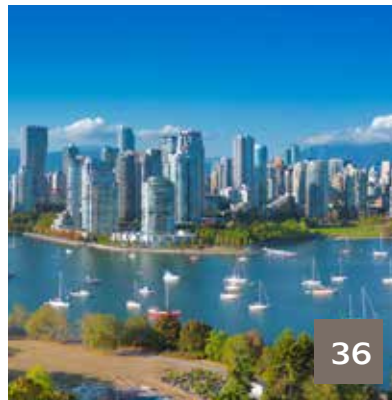
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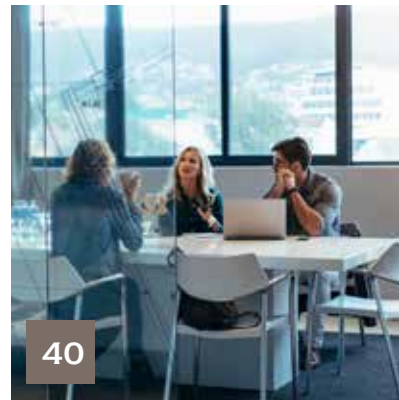
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# LETTER FROM THE CEO



## How Your Membership Can **EMPOWER YOU BY PROXIMITY** in Your Career

Association Forum welcomes a new fiscal year every April. Aligning the start of our fiscal year with spring feels right. As springtime bulbs start to bloom, so does a new year of programming, membership, and volunteerism.

To close out this fiscal year, hundreds of women will come together at the Women's Executive Forum. The event is designed to provide attendees with critical tools and knowledge that will help us collectively forge new pathways to leadership, belonging, and growth. This year's Women's Executive Forum theme (as well as this issue's theme) is Empowered by Proximity. What do we mean by that?

We know that great work is never done in a vacuum. It takes mentors, resources, and opportunities to advance. Empowered by Proximity is all about accessing those resources—and creating opportunities that will empower us to break through barriers and find our true potential.

Fawn Germer is a best-selling author of nine books, four-time Pulitzer nominated journalist, adventurer, risk-taker, and the keynote speaker for Women's Executive Forum. You can get a taste of her wisdom in the lead article she wrote for this issue (page 8): "The Secret to Building A Strong, Reliable Professional Network." Germer has led a fascinating life of ceaseless ambition, and she tells us what Empowered by Proximity means to her in this personal and inspirational piece.

Yet, Empowered by Proximity extends far beyond this issue of FORUM Magazine. This idea is core to our mission as an association. Your membership grants you access to people, ideas, education, and opportunities. Your membership puts you in proximity to incredible leadership and mentorship. Association Forum is a community, and we want you to leverage all your member benefits and feel empowered by doing so. Here are a few ways to do so:

### Participate in a SIG

Shared Interest Groups (SIGs)<sup>™</sup> are a favorite member benefit! These groups host volunteer-led learning and offer great networking opportunities. There are 14 different SIGs and each group meets twice a year. However, conversations take place year-round at AssociationForum.org in the online community in the MyForum section. You can join as many as you'd like and you're sure to make some meaningful connections with these active groups.

## Attend a Signature Event

Forum holds three signature events each year: Women's Executive Forum, Honors Gala, and Holiday Showcase. These premiere events draw hundreds of association professionals and showcase our community. Women's Executive Forum and Holiday Showcase are packed with education, while Honors Gala is a fundraising event celebrating industry excellence providing remarkable networking opportunities for everyone. Visit our website, [AssociationForum.org](https://AssociationForum.org), for more information.

## Read Forum Publications

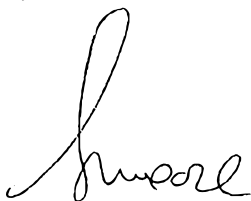
Look at you—you're already doing it! Reading this magazine (both in print, and online at [FORUMmagazine.org](https://FORUMmagazine.org)) is a great place to start. You'll find helpful how-to articles from association peers, interesting perspectives from experts, and member spotlights. Be sure to watch your email for Forum Focus as well. This is our monthly e-newsletter written just for members. You'll find links to our most-read FORUM articles, event reminders, member spotlights, and more.

## Check out Monthly Webinars

Did you know that monthly webinars are included with your membership? This is a great way to collect some free CE credits and check out topics relevant to the industry. Look at our calendar online at [AssociationForum.org](https://AssociationForum.org) to see which webinars are coming up!

## Professional Practice Statements

Your membership includes access to our library of professional practice statements. Developed and reviewed by experts, these statements are management tools designed for you. Areas of concentration include: strategic management; leadership; administration; knowledge management & research; governance & structure; public policy, government relations & coalition building; membership development; programs, products & services; and marketing, public relations and communications. Find these statements under the "resources" tab on [AssociationForum.org](https://AssociationForum.org) (note: you'll need to log into your member account to access the statements).



Save the dates for Forum's upcoming Signature Events.

### Honors Gala

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As part of our efforts to provide a Welcoming Environment\* for our members, we are providing a copy of our Core Values translated into **Portuguese** by Interpro Translation Solutions, Inc.

### Be a Welcoming Environment

We are a welcoming environment that actively seeks to enhance the larger community by recognizing the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. We will make everyone who interacts with us feel welcomed, represented, engaged, inspired and empowered.

### Embrace Innovation and Quality

We love to try new ideas and seek inspiration from inside and outside the association community — we value improvements big and small. Experimenting with breakthroughs is encouraged and celebrated; however, we know when to pull the plug. We aim to continuously improve.

### Have Fun and Stay Positive

It's a fact that you generally spend more time with your co-workers than you do with your own family. We strive to make our work environment one that is fun, positive and an overall great place to work.

### Open and Honest Communication and Teamwork

You don't know what you don't know! Effective communication is key. We shall cultivate an environment where we speak openly, honestly and with the goal of building a better team. Candor is constructively embraced. We will work collaboratively to deliver value to members.

### Accountability—Own It

We hold each other accountable and expect people to respectfully ask questions and raise concerns. Because work requires interdependent teams and collaboration, we will trust and depend on each other to be responsive and to deliver value and quality services to stakeholders.

### Win with Integrity

We operate ethically, contributing our time, talents and know-how to advance our communities where we work and live. We commit to growing our association in ways that benefit the environment and society.

Como parte dos esforços de oferecer aos nossos membros um Welcoming Environment\*, ou seja, um ambiente acolhedor, providenciamos uma versão em português dos nossos Valores fundamentais traduzida pela Interpro Translation Solutions, Inc.

### Ser um ambiente acolhedor

Somos um ambiente acolhedor que busca ativamente formas de beneficiar a comunidade ao reconhecer que o todo é sempre maior do que a soma das partes. Faremos o possível para que todos se sintam acolhidos, representados, engajados, inspirados e capacitados ao interagir conosco.

### Abraçar a inovação e a qualidade

Adoramos testar novas ideias e buscamos inspiração dentro e fora da comunidade da nossa associação. Valorizamos todas as melhorias, sejam elas grandes ou pequenas. Incentivamos e comemoramos experimentos com novos avanços, no entanto, sabemos o melhor momento para interrompê-los. Nosso objetivo é manter a melhoria contínua.

### Manter o pensamento positivo e se divertir

Muitas vezes, passamos mais tempo com nossos colegas de trabalho do que com a nossa própria família. Por esse motivo, fazemos o possível para tornar nosso ambiente de trabalho mais divertido, positivo e bom para se trabalhar de maneira geral.

### Comunicação honesta e aberta e trabalho em equipe

Não podemos trabalhar com informações que não temos. A comunicação eficaz é a chave. Devemos cultivar um ambiente em que possamos falar de maneira aberta e honesta com o intuito de crescer como equipe. A sinceridade deve ser abraçada e valorizada. Trabalharemos de maneira colaborativa para agregar valor aos nossos membros.

### A minha, a sua, a nossa responsabilidade

Assumimos nossas responsabilidades e esperamos que as pessoas tirem dúvidas e levantem questões de maneira respeitosa. Como o nosso trabalho exige colaboração e equipes interdependentes, confiamos e dependemos uns dos outros para melhorar nossa capacidade de resposta e prestar serviços de alto nível e qualidade às nossas partes interessadas.

### Vencer com integridade

A ética é uma parte fundamental da nossa operação, o que contribui para que nosso tempo, nossos talentos e nossa experiência promovam avanços nas comunidades onde trabalhamos e vivemos. Nosso compromisso é ampliar a nossa associação de formas que beneficiem o nosso ambiente e a sociedade.

# THE SECRET TO BUILDING

a Strong,  
Reliable  
Professional  
Network

*By Fawn Germer*

**If you can't call in chits from your network, you don't have a network. I am always amazed by the people who know people, but don't really know them.**

**T**hey circulate at parties, scour LinkedIn and do a good job of presenting themselves, follow up and delude themselves that they are doing a good job of networking. But, a lot of people truly suck at it. And if you are going to leverage your network as you “empower by proximity,” it's time for a crash course in how this really works.

Not long ago, I got a call from the chair of a women's leadership event that I was going to headline as keynote speaker in Philadelphia. Her company wanted some of Philly's most powerful women to come to the event.



“Do you mind doing the inviting?” she asked. This woman was a very senior executive at a major corporation.

“Don’t you know these women?” I asked, a little surprised. Someone at her level would most certainly have mingled with these people at events.

“Well, I’ve met them and e-mailed them, but I don’t really know them,” she said. “Not enough to ask for a favor.”

So, I invited four of the women because I knew them. I knew them because, when I met them, we talked about our dogs.

Yes, there you have it. Dogs.

I never talk to people I network with about their jobs because everybody else is doing that. They don’t remember it. I don’t talk about leadership or job titles or their companies or articles in the Wall Street Journal. Not at all. It’s dogs, cats, occasionally children and sometimes the Royal Family.

Most people just want a genuine connection with somebody because most networking feels transparent and transactional. My goal is to always build a network of friends, and as those relationships fill my life with love, fun and friendship, I also get a good dose of mentoring.

Build a network you can leverage by betting on your greatest asset: You.

Fifteen years ago, I was invited to speak to a gathering of 80 of the most powerful women in American business.

It was a terribly intimidating group, but an incredible opportunity for networking. I totally freaked out about what to pack, making a chart of every clothing change I would need. This was not my tribe. They were Neiman’s, Saks, and Lord & Taylor. I was all Stein-Mart (may it R.I.P!), Macy’s, and sometimes eBay.

But, once my bag was packed, I leaned into the moment.

---

*Build a network you can leverage by betting on your greatest asset: You.*



My greatest strength and weakness is that I am incapable of faking it. If I am lying, you know it. I get away with nothing. I've always felt like a bit of a misfit, but when I interviewed successful women leaders for my books, I found out that they feel like misfits, too! That is so liberating and empowering! All most people really want is to feel like they belong. What I now know is that all of those super-women were just as panicked about their wardrobes as I was.

We see intimidating, successful, impeccably dressed people and forget that, on the inside, they are yelling at themselves because they gained 20 pounds, beating themselves up because they have let someone in their family down, or dogging themselves with impostor syndrome while they work.

I've always been an unpolished, somewhat dorky human being, but I am genuine, trustworthy, and well-intentioned. People will either like me or they won't, but they will always deal with the real me.

That gives other misfits permission to drop their guards and feel comfortable.

When I spoke to that executive women's group, I attended their team-building events. I took pictures of them with other people, so I could forward the images. I showed them pictures of me kayaking with my dog in Florida. We talked so much about not much at all, then started talking about bad dates and divorces, and then somehow the topic turned to bad sex. I have no idea who started it, but after that, we were all inseparable.



*All most people really want is to feel like they belong.*



That was the day that the “Cool Table” was born. Fourteen super-women and me, who had nothing in common with any of them other than I was also a misfit. We’d email and text and make plans for all future conferences.

They referred me for speaking events over and over again, increasing my keynote business 30 percent the year we met. In return, I gave them the best executive coaching they could ever get – for free.

Those women went to the mat for me over and over and over again because they knew me. Not some fake, presentable version who shows up at a cocktail party wearing very appropriate attire, shakes a hand and recites a stupid elevator speech. From the beginning, I gave them the unpolished, somewhat nerdy but highly approachable version of Fawn Germer.

The executive director of that group once said, “Why are all of these people friends with you?”

“I dunno,” I answered. “I think maybe they don’t have any friends.”



There are a lot of executives who don’t.

We’ve been friends through so much. The women got even bigger jobs, or got fired. They got married, or divorced. They moved away, or moved home. We went through a lot of change. During Covid, we Zoomed every two weeks.

We never, ever talk shop. We’re just friends.

People help their friends. Professional contacts may help you a little, but if influential people know, trust and love you, they will stop everything to help you. [F](#)



**FAWN GERMER**

FAWN GERMER IS THE BEST-SELLING AUTHOR OF NINE BOOKS, INCLUDING “HARD WON WISDOM.” SHE HAS BEEN A KEYNOTE SPEAKER FOR NEARLY 100 FORTUNE 500 COMPANIES AND WAS NOMINATED FOR THE PULITZER PRIZE FOUR TIMES AS AN INVESTIGATIVE REPORTER. SHE IS AN INSPIRING STORYTELLER AND ADVENTURER. FAWN IS THIS YEAR’S CLOSING KEYNOTE SPEAKER AT WOMEN’S EXECUTIVE FORUM™.



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## WEBINARS

March 19

**Advancing Equal Pay for Yourself and the Field**

April 16

**From Raw Data to Real Insights: Preparing Your Association for AI**

May 9

**DEI in Action: How to Move from Dialogue to Execution**

June 6

**4 Day Work Week: How to Create Opportunities for Employee Wellness While Maintaining Member Engagement**

July 11

**Don't Leave Money on the Table: Pricing Strategies for Associations**

*Webinars are complimentary for Association Forum members.  
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BOLD

# BREAKTHROUGHS

**Playing Big, Leaning into the Uncomfortable  
and Finding Inspiration and Support Along the Way**

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DENISE FROEMMING  
HAS 34 YEARS OF  
ACCOUNTING AND  
MANAGEMENT  
EXPERIENCE—23  
OF THOSE YEARS  
WITH NONPROFIT  
ASSOCIATIONS. .

---

DONNA BRIGHTON  
HAS MORE THAN  
TWO DECADES  
OF EXECUTIVE  
COACHING,  
SPEAKING, AND  
REAL-LIFE BUSINESS  
EXPERIENCE.

*By Denise Froemming & Donna Brighton*

**This article leverages both women's expertise and lived experiences in taking risks in your career.**

**C**ould you use a brilliant, bold, breakthrough in your life? After the pandemic reshaping everyone's life, it's time to achieve more in 2024. You have all the brilliance you need inside. Access your brilliance, apply bold action, and achieve the breakthrough you need to get beyond the obstacle you're facing.

Playing bigger and achieving a brilliant breakthrough often involves taking bold and unconventional steps.

Here are three radical steps to help you on your journey:

## PLAY BIGGER BY EMBRACING FEAR AND FAILURE

**RADICAL STEP:** Make fear and failure your allies rather than enemies.



Many people are held back by the fear of failure so they play small. This limits them and prevents them from reaching their full potential. Did you know that Michelangelo illegally dissected human bodies to better understand the muscles, bones, and the overall structure of the human body? Although it was taboo to work with cadavers, he pushed past the fear of being caught and gained knowledge which significantly influenced the realism and accuracy of his sculptures and paintings. The results of Michelangelo's anatomical studies are evident in his masterpieces, such as the "David" and the frescoes on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. The detailed musculature, lifelike poses, and emotional expressions in his works showcase a profound understanding of human anatomy.

At the early stages of Denise's professional journey, she stood at a pivotal juncture. She was an integral part of a family business that was not only flourishing but also foundational to her identity. Her contributions to the business were significant, informed by years of growing the business to thrive. Yet, her academic tenure, culminating in a business degree, had ignited within her a desire for something beyond the familiar success she had known. Confronted with the allure of the known and the uncertainty of the unexplored, Denise faced a life-changing decision. With measured courage, she chose to venture beyond the secure confines of the family business and into the unknown.

This bold philosophy has been a consistent value woven throughout Denise's career. This vision was pivotal in transforming organizations, whether it was business model transformations or rebranding. In each role, Denise has applied her philosophy with unwavering conviction, approaching each challenge as an opportunity to innovate and redefine the boundaries of success.

Actively seek out opportunities that might lead to failure. Understand that failure is a stepping stone to success and a crucial part of the learning process. Don't celebrate failure for the sake of failure but as an opportunity to learn and change.

---

*Failure is nothing more than a source of feedback.*

Embrace fear as a signal that you are pushing your boundaries and growing. You can't eliminate fear, but you can get beyond fear. This mindset shift allows you to take risks and make decisions that can lead to brilliant, bold, breakthroughs.

Here is how to put this into action:

- **Reframe your experiences.** Examine the stories you tell yourself about your failures. Assess what you've learned and recast the story from the perspective of what you learned versus what you lost.
- **Do something that scares you.** That doesn't mean you eliminate the fear, but embracing it gives boldness to take action in other areas. Donna doesn't like heights, so she went skydiving! Do a cold plunge, sing karaoke, write the first chapter of the book you've been meaning to write.

## BE BOLD—CHALLENGE THE STATUS QUO

**RADICAL STEP:** Question conventional wisdom and challenge the status quo in your industry or field.

2

: *Whenever*  
: *you find*  
: *yourself*  
: *on the*  
: *side of the*  
: *majority,*  
: *it's time to*  
: *pause and*  
: *reflect.*  
:  
: *—MARK TWAIN*

Ford challenged the status quo in 2006 and hired an engineer from Boeing, an airplane company, to lead their car company. When Alan Mulally arrived, Ford was facing severe financial difficulties, terrible morale, and significant operational inefficiencies. He emphasized the importance of collaboration and transparency, and introduced a unified global approach known as the “One Ford” strategy. He made strategic decisions that defied conventional wisdom. During the financial crisis of 2008-2009, while competitors sought government bailouts, Mulally decided against accepting federal assistance and through his leadership that challenged the status quo, Ford underwent a remarkable transformation. The company returned to profitability, introduced successful new models and regained market share.

How do you think about your next move? Instead of just setting a goal, why don't you deconstruct your future and create a success strategy?

This is the Brilliant Bold Breakthrough Coaching process which involves three components to success.

Start by **deconstructing** or unpacking everything about yourself. Document your history, skills, strengths, education, experience, patterns, and purpose. These are the building blocks for your brilliant, bold, breakthrough.

The next step is to **review** the information you collected and reconnect the pieces in a new way to design your future.

The last step is to **discover** the way forward as you implement your design. Challenge the status quo by breaking apart the pieces to rebuild and create a brilliant, bold, breakthrough.

Brilliant, Bold, Breakthroughs come from challenging established norms and thinking differently. Identify the commonly accepted practices or beliefs in your life and leadership and critically assess them. Look for ways to disrupt the status quo and introduce innovative ideas. This may involve taking unconventional approaches, introducing new technologies, or redefining the way things are done. Don't be afraid to be a disruptor and pave the way for innovative, groundbreaking solutions.

Put this into action:

- **Be curious.** Read a book that is not your preferred genre. Learn a new skill and experience the thrill of expanding your perspective. Tim Ferris did exactly this in the “Four Hour Chef,” where he shares his cooking journey and how he accelerated his learning in something completely unfamiliar to him.
- **Apply the Breakthrough coaching process.** Get a coach to challenge you or DIY and go through the process of deconstructing, designing and discovering your future.

*Instead of just setting a goal, why don't you deconstruct your future and create a success strategy?*

## CULTIVATE A DIVERSE NETWORK

**RADICAL STEP:** Build a diverse and unconventional network that extends beyond your industry, your traditional peer group and your comfort zone.

3

The communities and networks we build are comfortable, familiar and often status quo. Imagine having people in your life that reflect all your unique facets.

Breakthrough brilliance often emerges at the intersection of different ideas and perspectives. Instead of surrounding yourself with like-minded individuals, intentionally seek out connections with people from diverse backgrounds, industries, and disciplines. Engage in conversations with those who challenge your thinking and introduce you to new ways of approaching problems. This

cross-pollination of ideas can spark creativity and open up new avenues for breakthroughs that you might not have considered within your usual circle.

Put this into action:

- **Sign up for a conference or event in a subject area completely different from what you would normally attend.**

Donna went to a Flow for Writers class where she was surrounded by fascinating people like someone from Seal Team Six, the top women's backcountry skier and many more who she would have never crossed paths with in her everyday life.

- **Join a mastermind group that is made up of people with unique perspectives.**

A mastermind group is a peer-to-peer mentoring group that offers advice and support to help you achieve a specific goal. Great leaders learn and grow from being around other people who challenge them, so find a community that stretches and grows you.

: *Break-  
through  
brilliance  
often  
emerges  
at the  
intersection  
of different  
ideas and  
perspectives.*

: *Remember,  
playing bigger  
and achieving  
brilliant, bold,  
breakthroughs  
requires a  
willingness to  
step outside  
your comfort  
zone, embrace  
uncertainty, and  
challenge the  
norm.*



Remember, playing bigger and achieving brilliant, bold, breakthroughs requires a willingness to step outside your comfort zone, embrace uncertainty, and challenge the norm. By taking these radical steps, you position yourself for growth, innovation, and the possibility of reaching new heights in your life and leadership.

Share your story of a brilliant, bold, breakthrough by emailing us at [Breakthrough@BrightonLeadership.com](mailto:Breakthrough@BrightonLeadership.com). [F](#)

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*Playing bigger and achieving brilliant, bold, breakthroughs requires a willingness to step outside your comfort zone, embrace uncertainty, and challenge the norm.*



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**DENISE FROEMMING, CPA, CAE, MBA**

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DENISE IS THE PRESIDENT AND CEO OF THE CALIFORNIA SOCIETY OF CPAS (CALCPA), THE NATION'S LARGEST STATE CPA SOCIETY. SHE HAS 34 YEARS OF ACCOUNTING AND MANAGEMENT EXPERIENCE—23 OF THOSE YEARS WITH NONPROFIT ASSOCIATIONS. SHE IS ALSO THE IMMEDIATE PAST CHAIR OF ASSOCIATION FORUM'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS.



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**DONNA BRIGHTON**

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DONNA IS A CULTURE CHANGE STRATEGIST AND BUSINESS AUTHOR. SHE HAS MORE THAN TWO DECADES OF EXECUTIVE COACHING, SPEAKING, AND REAL-LIFE BUSINESS EXPERIENCE.

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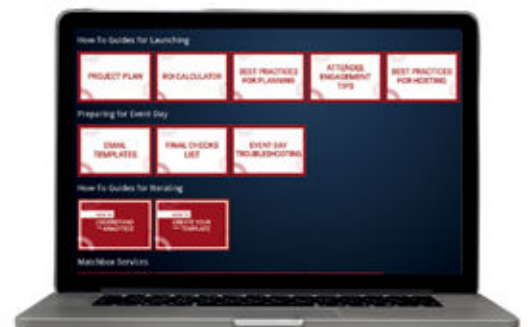


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- Customizable, validated templates for online event formats
- Blueprints for monetization
- Best-practice guides and resources
- Access to the Matchbox Network





# FORTY UNDER 40®

## Inspiration, Empowerment, and Excellence

**W**e asked the 2023–24 class of Forty Under 40 recipients about their journeys. Read along for inspiration and insight on how these young professionals made it to the top of their game.

## How did you get into association management?

### APRIL TONE, MBA, CAE

“I used to say association life fell in my lap, but I recently realized it has always been in my blood. Growing up my family was known as (cue the superhero music) ‘The Ultimate Volunteers.’ I was fortunate to learn the importance of service from my mother. She successfully held numerous volunteer leadership positions at our church, in the community, and with her sorority. I was a volunteer alongside her. I witnessed what great servant leadership looks like. It serves me now in my professional and volunteer roles.”

### CORY MARTIN, MPA, CAE

“I had tremendous mentors in college that helped shape my career path. Coincidentally, they ran association management companies and served on association boards. This steered me toward association work and ultimately led me to launch my own AMC in 2021.”



### **JEN MEHLTRETTER, M.ED.**

"I've always known that I wanted to be in a profession that helps others. Growing up, I thought it meant I was supposed to be a teacher. After stumbling through teaching to higher ed, I found the association management space and I couldn't be happier."

### **NATALIE HUGHES**

"My journey into associations and nonprofits was influenced by my aunt whose unwavering dedication to Girl Scouts spanned from childhood involvement to serving as the CEO of a council. She showed me how meaningful a mission-driven career can be, and I have since discovered that for myself. I love being part of something bigger, and it thrills me that my day-to-day work can shape the experiences of members, volunteers, donors and colleagues."

### **REBECCA BOWEN, MA, CCC-SLP, PNAP**

"I came to association management first as a member. As a speech-language pathologist, I was a member of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) for more than a decade before joining the staff. I saw the impact the association had on the direction and value of the professions and was interested in becoming part of that important work."

**I used to say association life fell in my lap, but I recently realized it has always been in my blood.**

**APRIL  
TONE**

2023-24

Forty Under 40

Pages 22-23, from  
top to bottom, left  
to right:

Dana Anaman  
Christopher Beaman  
Alicia Belcaster  
Maura Biszewski  
Genevieve Borello  
Charles Bowen  
Rebecca Bowen  
Ally Brown  
Stephanie Bruno  
Sara Bustard  
Jason Cohen  
Michael Cowden  
Emily Fekete  
Kara Ferguson  
Jamaica Gayle  
Mario Guel  
Marlee Hancoop  
Natalie Hughes  
Crystal Kaminski  
Toni Kervina  
Andrea King  
Kate Lindley  
Krzysz Litewka  
Guilherme Lopes  
Cory Martin  
Jessica McClain  
Bailey McMurray  
Jen Mehltrittter  
Patrick Nolan  
Amanda E. Plummer  
Erica Poff  
Michelle Runge  
Alicia Schuessler  
Laura Shelters  
Emily Thompson  
April Tone  
Benjamin van Loon  
Laura Vera  
Celia Zamora  
Diane Ziegenhorn

## What inspires you?

### ALLY BROWN, MS

"I draw my inspiration from incredible women like my grandmother, Kim Sun Sil. She embodies boundless determination, driven by her unwavering commitment to create a better life for her child and grandchildren. Born in North Korea, she made it to South Korea before eventually immigrating to the United States with my mom. Her tireless work ethic and unwavering love serve as a constant source of motivation in my life. Every day, I am inspired by her resilience and the enduring impact of her sacrifices. She would literally give the shirt off her back to keep us warm, and she'd give her last dollar to ensure we never went hungry. Her love knows no bounds, and I strive to live up to the legacy she will undoubtedly leave."

### AMANDA PLUMMER, R, ESQ., CAE

"My 10-month-old daughter inspires me to show her that you can have a family and still achieve professional success."

### BEN VAN LOON, MA

"I'm inspired by problem solvers. It's easy to just say 'no' to something, and it's even easier to destroy what someone else has created. But it takes real intelligence, insight—and even empathy—to fix something that's broken, or to offer actual, concrete solutions for improvement and innovation."

### EMILY FEKETE, PH.D.

"Life in general is inspiring. There are so many ways that people can choose to go through life. As someone who is trained in geography, I enjoy learning about how people live. In my daily work, if I can help people by connecting them to resources or other people, I feel accomplished."

### LAURA VERA, MSW, LSW, LSSGB

"Being a mother is the most meaningful accomplishment of my life. I have three small children (ages 8, 5, and 3) and they watch the way I move through this world. It is a true honor to demonstrate kindness, hard work, patience, and standing up for and helping others. They inspire me daily with their honesty, curiosity, and humor, and have made me stronger, braver, and more loving (also more tired)! Working for mission-driven organizations where I can see the difference I make and positively impact patient care gives me a great sense of purpose."

### MARIO A. GUEL, M. JUR.

"My parents influenced my desire to serve others. They came to this country as migrant workers, picking sugar beets in Minnesota. My father had been a teacher in Mexico. During one harvest season, he restarted his educational journey and attended college in the U.S. to become a certified teacher and soccer coach. He recently retired after more than 30 years of service. He ended his career at my alma mater as the head soccer coach."

### ALICIA SCHUESSLER, CAE

"I am continually inspired by the volunteer leaders I've been fortunate enough to work alongside. By day they are researchers and physicians trying to cure and treat cancer patients with immunotherapy. In addition to having one of the most noble professions, they are foodies, parents, rock stars (yes, some of them are in a band), escapees from East Berlin before the fall of the wall, marathon runners, Pacific Crest Trail hikers, taking violin lessons for the first time at age 65, and the list goes on. They inspire me to live life to the fullest and make the most of the time we have on this planet."

[My children] inspire me daily with their honesty, curiosity, and humor, and have made me stronger, braver, and more loving (also more tired)!

LAURA  
VERA

## How have you been “Empowered by Proximity”?

### CELIA CHOMÓN ZAMORA, PH.D., CAE

“As a Latina immigrant, the theme ‘Empowered by Proximity’ resonates deeply with my journey. Every stage of my career has been influenced not just by my own ambition, but by the enriching tapestry of people and resources around me. From the wisdom passed down from my elders, to the dynamic energies of my colleagues, and the fresh perspectives of those I’ve had the privilege to mentor. The strength of proximity for me has never been just about physical closeness, but about the deep-rooted connections forged by shared experiences, cultural understandings, and a collective drive for success. It’s been a testament to the power of community, reminding me that when we surround ourselves with diverse brilliance, we’re not only empowered but also become a beacon for others.”

### DANA ANAMAN, MBA, CAE, CPIA

“It’s an incredibly small world out there. I’ve found many opportunities have arisen from people I’ve met, events I’ve attended, and mentors in my life! I’ve had short conversations with many people in the association community, who have broadened my horizons and expanded my lens. Even applying for this award happened because of the recommendation of an association connection. A simple suggestion sparked a series of events that culminated in me being named a 2023-24 Forty under 40 recipient!”

### ERICA POFF, CAE, PMP, IOM

“I wouldn’t be where I am today professionally without the support of mentors throughout my career. Having people who are willing to advocate for your growth, whether that’s by approving funding for a professional development course or involving you in the kinds of decision-making processes that help develop your leadership potential, is essential. I’m incredibly grateful to those who showed up for me and believed in me over the years, and I now try to do that for others as a leader in my workplace and through volunteering with my professional society.”

### GENEVIEVE BORELLO, CAE, MPA

“I’ve strategically surrounded myself with incredible influences, my peers are always a source of inspiration (and motivation). From volunteering for my local alumni association to getting involved with ASAE, I’ve been lucky to have the opportunity to grow outside my career because of these volunteer experiences. I’ll give a special shout-out to my first boss, Martha Malone, who really encouraged me to get involved and think about my career path as a young professional.”

### NATALIE HUGHES

“I’ve had the privilege of working alongside many amazing women throughout my career. They have led and inspired me by sharing their experiences and expertise. Thanks to their guidance and, more importantly, their trust, I have been able to consistently learn and grow as they empower me with opportunities to explore interests and develop skills.”

This program is powered by the following partners



### Watch the Videos!

Scan the QR code to watch the Forty Under 40 recipients relay the best advice they’ve ever received.

“It’s an incredibly small world... I’ve found many opportunities have arisen from people I’ve met, events I’ve attended, and mentors in my life!”

DANA ANAMAN

# BUILDING TOMORROW:

HACIA's Member Development Initiatives Are Reshaping the Construction Industry



*By Ewa Greenier*

**In today's dynamic professional landscape, the role of associations in empowering and supporting their members' professional development and workforce needs takes on a profound significance.**

**A**ssociations serve not only as catalysts for individual member development but also influence industry trends, thus shaping the trajectory of their respective professions. Jacqueline Gomez, Executive Director of the Hispanic American Construction Industry Association (HACIA), describes the crucial role associations play in anticipating and responding to workforce trends. By monitoring emerging technologies, market shifts, and evolving best practices, associations can identify the skills their members need to stay ahead. From tailored training programs to fostering a culture of continuous learning, we explore how HACIA actively shapes the future of the construction industry, ensuring its members are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and

abilities to navigate and lead change within their industry.

As a champion for equity in the construction industry, HACIA works to ensure the equitable participation of its members by promoting growth, quality of work, professionalism, and integrity. HACIA has built a strong community of over 400 members in construction-related industries, including general contractors, technology agencies, design services, and start-ups. Jacqueline Gomez spoke with us about HACIA's mission and HACIA University (HACIA U), which offers a suite of training and certification programs, providing opportunities for skill and network building and creating sustainable change in the construction industry.

Above: Carolyn Caballero (HACIA Board member), Jacqueline Gomez (executive director, HACIA), and Jeanette Chavarria-Torres (HACIA Board member) at HACIA Scholarship and Education Foundation networking event.

## How does HACIA work to promote equity in the construction industry?

“HACIA is a nonprofit organization that focuses on training and advocating for minority- and women-owned businesses in the construction industry. We are a champion for equity. We want the construction industry to better reflect the people in the communities where we work and live. That is our mission. HACIA advocates for diversity and equity in construction contracts, and not only in the hard hat construction space but also in the professional services areas such as architectural and engineering,” Gomez says.

Gomez highlights, “In addition to inclusion in contracts, we advocate by ensuring that our members have a seat at the table and they are in front of the policymakers and the key stakeholders. We want their voices to be heard, discuss business challenges, and influence change. We hope that facilitating these conversations evolve into fruitful discussions and develop solutions for overcoming barriers and needed change for the construction industry.”

## What type of workforce training have you found necessary in the current economy?

When Gomez became HACIA’s Executive Director in April 2021, the Board of Directors wanted direction on how to elevate the organization and improve their existing, smaller training program. “Because of the brand equity and being an established organization, we were able to secure grants, with which we created more robust training program on the workforce front and on the business diversity front,” Gomez explains.

“During the COVID pandemic, many industries shut down, except for the healthcare industry and the construction industry. Construction continued despite health threats due to a lack of rules around how to build during a pandemic. Buildings still needed

to be built, and bridges repaired. Construction workers were an essential workforce, creating a demand. Despite the demand, there continues to be a major concern about whether there is enough labor to handle it. In 2020, the unions had to call many of their retirees back because there was just not enough workforce to fill the required jobs,” she adds.

This was an opportunity for major impact. HACIA saw this time as a call to action not only to fill the gap but to diversify the pipeline. “Let’s help create that needed pipeline through construction industry pre-apprenticeship training programs. We developed three main workforce hands on training programs focusing on carpentry, electrical, and general contracting. These are pre-apprenticeship training programs, which allow individuals who have interest to get hands-on experience of what is required to work in the construction industry and provide them a preview of the work environment, requirements, and benefits. These programs run from three to four months and meet two to three times per week. While there are classroom and testing components, the value of these programs lies in the hands-on component and connections. Through HACIA’s network of construction industry leaders, we can leverage our network and relationships with our member organizations and bring cohorts directly to project sites. Trainees are given the opportunity to speak to the job site superintendent, put on helmets and other personal protective equipment (PPE) and walk the jobsite, and have hands-on exposure to equipment such as power tools. They visit various areas of the job site—sometimes they are on the roof of a building, or they are in the mechanical room, but they are learning from folks that are actually building and getting a sense of what it is like.”

Through this exposure, individuals may discover they’re suited for one role over another. For example, if an individual is scared of heights, there are many other opportunities in the construction industry, including the project management side. Notably, one program participant was offered a job as

: *As a champion  
: for equity in the  
: construction  
: industry, HACIA  
: works to ensure  
: the equitable  
: participation  
: of its members  
: by promoting  
: growth, quality  
: of work,  
: professionalism,  
: and integrity.*



**HACIA is intentional in developing training programs and aims to meet participants where they are in terms of training.**

an assistant to the project manager on the construction of the Obama Presidential Center, along with another HACIA member. Additionally, trainees receive Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) training and certification, making them more competitive when applying for positions in the construction industry.

### What support does HACIA provide to program participants?

HACIA is intentional in developing training programs and aims to meet participants where they are in terms of training. HACIA explored the possibility of providing a hybrid training program, but an in-person format works better for the industry. Construction occurs in person, and participants need to experience in-person, on-site training. On average, HACIA receives 100 applications for each cohort and carefully selects about 25 participants. There are typically three to four cohorts per year, strategically avoiding peak construction season in the summer. The program is state-funded and offered at no cost to the participant. It requires an interest and commitment to actively participate in the program. HACIA emphasizes these responsibilities and offers support services to set up participants for success.

“It’s not an easy industry, so participants need to set themselves apart from the rest to be hired after the training. The goal at the end of the day is to provide participants with the opportunity for a good paying, long-term

career that they are proud of and can change the trajectory of their and their family’s lives,” Gomez describes. “During the application process, each applicant undergoes a phone screen. Before starting the program, we emphasize the immersive nature of the program and participant expectations, such as the need to have reliable transportation to make it in every day, on time. HACIA also provides financial assistance if needed, such as stipends for transportation, CTA bus passes, or assistance with childcare to help bridge the financial gap and support participant success in the program. We also make sure that participants complete their OSHA testing, participate in site visits, and encourage them to use our other services such as resume assistance, interviewing skills, and additional resources and study guides to help with testing.”

### What does the business diversity side of your training program entail?

HACIA’s business diversity training program addresses the needs of those who may be in the early stages of running their own business, and while they may know the construction or technical side of the business, they may need additional support for the business and administrative aspects of the work.

Gomez describes the program as, “providing individuals with the tools, resources, and network to running a competitive and

Above: HACIA’s second annual workforce and business capacity program graduation at Malcolm X College.

successful business. Some of our training topics include bidding and estimating, project management, bonding and insurance or access to capital. One of the biggest obstacles for small businesses is access to capital, therefore we work with business owners on ensuring that they have the required cash flow and are connected to proper resources. We educate business owners on how to recruit and build a dedicated team of project managers, estimators, foremen, and superintendents and equip their teams with required skills.”

For business owners who transition from the project site to the administrative side of the business, HACIA offers a program called Executive Fellows, which is a one-on-one coaching experience for established business owners. This is a grant-supported program that helps business owners identify and overcome obstacles and build skills to take business to the next level. It focuses on the legal, financial, operations, and marketing aspects of the business. The program is offered at no fee to the business owners and offers access to a subject matter expert who will work with the business owner on critical business areas such as business development. This includes nailing down a great “elevator pitch”, business plan, branding, bidding, contract negotiations, and other various business aspects to help the business owner succeed.

### **What impact have your programs had on the industry?**

Before, during, and after a workforce program, HACIA surveys participants to gauge where they are and how confident they are in different areas of study. Gomez says that throughout the program, “we see that participants feel much more confident based on the education provided. For example, in one of the tracks, they speak to an attorney about contract negotiations. From this, it

leads them to bidding more confidently and being able to manage their risk and negotiate their agreements. Overall, participants report the program was extremely beneficial to their business and that they have learned to manage their business more thoughtfully and conduct a risk analysis versus just signing off on agreements without asking the right questions or at least now they will have a subject matter expert that they can call.”

HACIA holds mixers for participants and coaches from the Executive Fellows program, developers, and other construction industry leaders as a networking opportunity and hopefully a potential contracting opportunity. “Since they have gone through our program, participants are better informed, prepared, and know what questions to ask of the construction industry leaders who could be ones negotiating with them on their next contract. We encourage participants to stay involved with HACIA, as we continue checking in on our program participants’ success and offering new networking opportunities to get them in front of more potential clients,” Gomez highlights.

HACIA’s ability to be agile and create new programs as needed proves very beneficial. For example, golf is a popular pastime among construction business owners, and many women business owners voiced that this is a skill they would like to learn. HACIA organized a group for women and brought in a golfing instructor to help learn golf basics. This group organically evolved beyond its original purpose and now “we build camaraderie amongst each other and create a safe space of just women to support each other. It started out with 12 women and now there are around 45 to 50 of us. We get together quarterly to talk about industry challenges, what it is like being a woman in the industry, and just be there and support each other through our challenges and celebrate our successes,” Gomez summarizes.

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*“We get together quarterly to talk about industry challenges, what it is like being a woman in the industry, and just be there and support each other through our challenges and celebrate our successes.”*

– Jacqueline Gomez, Executive Director of HACIA



**EWA GREENIER**

EWA IS DIRECTOR, PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE, AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF NURSE ANESTHESIOLOGY AND MEMBER OF ASSOCIATION FORUM'S CONTENT WORKING GROUP.



**CELESTE SMITH, CAE**

CELESTE IS DIRECTOR, LEADERSHIP CERTIFICATES AND PROGRAMS AT THE ASSOCIATION OF STATE AND TERRITORIAL HEALTH OFFICIALS AND A MEMBER OF ASSOCIATION FORUM'S CONTENT WORKING GROUP..

## Does HACIA have partnerships in curriculum development and program implementation?

"HACIA is really unique in the sense that you will not find another organization in the city or state that is a membership organization and provides such robust training programs in the construction industry. We rely on our members as our informants on industry needs and opportunities to expand our training offerings. For example, we heard that there is a need for more engineers. In this case, HACIA took on the challenge, and built a new training program for assistant project engineers. This will create a pipeline and put individuals on track to work in the engineering field without an Engineering degree but still have the option to pursue one should they decide." Gomez continues, "If there is a great enough interest, we will create the program. We have good collaborative relationships with our partners. We work with partners such as Institute for Workforce Education with Saint Augustine College (now Lewis University) to deliver the curriculum training. We also work with College of DuPage on the owner-to-CEO for construction program. At Elgin Community College, we are going to roll out an HVAC program as we continue to see workforce needs in this area. For the future, we see a need for development training in green and sustainable construction. We have already rolled out some programming around solar panel installation and we are looking into installation of electric vehicle charging stations as these are newer to Illinois."

: **"HACIA is really unique in the sense that you will not find another organization in the city or state that is a membership organization and provides such robust training programs in the construction industry."**

: **- Jacqueline Gomez, Executive Director of HACIA**

## How do you foresee workforce requirements changing considering technological advancements and AI?

Gomez notes that HACIA has been discussing and exploring the role of expanding technology and artificial intelligence (AI) in the construction industry. She notes, "We've seen significant technological advancements, especially the use of drones used to map, survey and inspect the worksite. 3-D construction print modeling and virtual reality tools offer the industry the ability to test designs. Construction professionals often view AI's potential in blueprint and design part of the business. While AI's impact is more pronounced in project management than on the job site, where hands-on labor prevails, its exact role in construction remains uncertain. It's an evolving landscape, and we anticipate more insights to come."

## Conclusion

HACIA's comprehensive approach to workforce development and business diversity is transforming the construction industry to meet evolving workforce needs. They provide comprehensive workforce support to individuals and business owners, supporting the career development needs of their members. Gomez's leadership has propelled HACIA into a pivotal role, championing equity, fostering skills development, supporting career development, and creating a professional support network. HACIA's leadership within the industry addresses the immediate and long-term workforce needs, cultivates a diverse talent pool, and provides ongoing support. HACIA is poised to expand its reach and actively shape the future of the construction industry. [E](#)

*Celeste Smith, CAE, contributed to this article.*

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“I tell my students, ‘When you get these jobs that you have been so brilliantly trained for, just remember that your real job is that if you are free, you need to free somebody else. If you have some power, then your job is to empower somebody else.’”

– TONI MORRISON

# EXCELERATE



## NEW POWER LEADERSHIP

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Morrison’s words are worth repeating: if you have some power, then your job is to empower somebody else. This idea is at the heart of New Power Leadership. New power leaders leverage the voices around them and disperse power.



## TOMORROW IS NOW

The theme of this issue, Empowered by Proximity, was chosen to align with Women’s Executive Forum. Empowering people is what associations are all about. We exist to empower others in their professions and industries.



## INTRAPRENEURSHIP

But think, have you empowered your colleagues? Your peers? Your direct reports? Take a cue from Nobel Prize winner, Toni Morrison, and set someone free.

# SUCCESSFUL WOMEN NEVER

Omaha Mayor Jean Stothert is  
Building the City of Tomorrow



DEBORAH WARD

DEBORAH IS  
EXECUTIVE  
DIRECTOR OF  
VISIT OMAHA.

*By Deborah Ward*

Fireworks illuminated the warm August night, as thousands of visitors gathered at The RiverFront in Omaha to stroll, skate, play and people-watch.

**T**he new tri-park development, the result of a four-year \$325-million transformation, reconnects downtown Omaha to the Missouri River, and offers vibrant attractions revitalizing the city's urban core.

Earlier that day, Omaha Mayor Jean Stothert spoke at the ribbon cutting. She noted the vast changes the city had undergone since she first arrived 30 years earlier and thanked the community and philanthropists. She didn't take credit for herself—a typical move for this service-minded leader who's enjoyed the longest tenure of any Omaha mayor.



# STAND STILL:



But credit is nonetheless due. About 10 years ago, two business leaders approached Stothert, who had just started her first term as mayor in 2013, with a bold request. Could she back their vision to transform 72 city-owned acres into a gem of a public space in order to revitalize the landscape and attract visitors? Stothert replied with an emphatic yes.

Since becoming the first woman to ever hold the Omaha office, Stothert has employed this forward-looking approach, best expressed in her 2023 State of the City speech.

“Cities never stand still. They are either growing and moving forward, or they are declining and falling behind,” she said.

During her unprecedented three terms as Omaha’s mayor, Stothert has tackled critical issues such as economic development and budget management, leading efforts to make Omaha both a better place to live and an impressive visitor destination.

Under Mayor Stothert’s leadership, Omaha has added new urban entertainment districts, boutique hotels, and visitor-worthy attractions such as a cutting-edge STEM discovery center, a new downtown music venue, and, of course, The RiverFront.

More significant developments are on the horizon. Tranquility Commons is a premier multi-sport youth complex that will attract even more youth sports tournaments. The Omaha airport is undergoing a \$950-million modernization and expansion to accommodate increased passenger traffic. And a modern streetcar connecting downtown to midtown Omaha will add even more ease to existing public transit.

The mayor’s support of convention and tourism business has helped propel the city’s success as a visitor destination. In 2022, 13.5 million visitors traveled to Omaha, spending nearly \$1.5 billion. Projections are optimistic for healthy growth to continue, spurred by Stothert’s commitment and vision.

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*“Cities never stand still. They are either growing and moving forward, or they are declining and falling behind.”*

— Omaha Mayor Jean Stothert

Stothert's success hasn't come without challenges. Even well-meaning people have made assumptions. During a flight, an airline pilot announced he had a special guest onboard, and welcomed the "gentleman," assuming the mayor of Omaha—sight unseen—to be "Gene" Stothert.

She can laugh about it. She's developed tough skin during her professional and political career.

Stothert is a native Midwesterner, born in Illinois. She worked as a critical care nurse and head nurse before becoming department head of cardiovascular surgery at St. Louis University. After her family moved to Omaha in 1993, she volunteered with Millard Public Schools, one of several school districts in the metropolitan area. She later served on the Millard Board of Education for 11 years, including three as president. In 2006, Stothert ran for Nebraska Legislature and won—or so it first seemed.

Nine days later, the race flipped. She had lost by 14 votes. Undaunted, Stothert believed she would have another opportunity to serve. In 2009, she was elected to Omaha City Council and then decided to run for mayor. She knocked on thousands of doors to secure the votes, ever mindful of her previous 14-vote loss. She won her first run for mayor with 57% of the votes. Then she won again and again.


Stothert's background as a nurse, volunteer, board of education member, and city council member refined the leadership skills she uses as mayor—active listening, respecting diverse opinions, and serving with integrity.

Stothert hasn't decided whether she'll seek a fourth term—but she still has passion and energy for the job. Speaking to a local news organization, Stothert said part of her consideration will be, "what I could finish doing... and what I could get done."

Long after the final fireworks sizzled out on the night of The RiverFront's grand opening, the parks still sparkle with energy. Visitors and residents gather there through the seasons. Autumn offers trick-or-treat events and spooky movie showings. In winter, the parks glow with holiday lights, fire pits and merry faces flushed from ice skating. Spring and summer promise the return of abundant gardens, flowing waterfalls, picnics, and free outdoor concerts.

It would be easy to think this is more than enough. But if one takes Stothert's words to heart, that cities are either growing or declining, then it's clear to see which way Omaha is headed.

Looking to the skyline, a stunning 44-story building rises in the distance, it's the new headquarter building for Mutual of Omaha, one of four Fortune 500 companies that call Omaha home. Nearby, the Joslyn Art Museum will reopen in 2024 featuring a new 42,000-square-foot expansion with light-filled galleries and community spaces. And in 2027, a modern streetcar will whisk visitors from midtown to downtown to enjoy it all.

It's a tempting list of to-dos for a mayor who, like her beloved city, never stands still. 



*Stothert's background as a nurse, volunteer, board of education member, and city council member refined the leadership skills she uses as mayor—active listening, respecting diverse opinions, and serving with integrity.*

This article is powered  
by **Excelerate Partner:**  
**Visit Omaha**



# FROM CONVENTIONAL TO CONSCIOUS: **Embracing Responsible Meetings in a Changing World**

*By Sarah Graveline*

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**Sustainability and overarching Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) goals have become central to organizations—and the meetings and events industry is no exception.**

**C**onsidering the growing demands for responsible practices and the opportunity for conferences to make lasting impacts, there are multiple opportunities for association professionals to foster more socially and environmentally responsible meetings.

Now, more than ever, clients are asking for meetings and events that align with their organizational and ESG targets. Amidst external pressures and a growing movement, more and more organizations are committing to reducing their emissions and to turning sustainability goals into concrete action: In a survey report conducted by the Incentive Research Foundation (IRF, 2023) nearly 80% of respondents noted there to be some manner of increased pressure from clients for more sustainable meetings, events, travel, and venue options.



The expectation and movement towards sustainable and responsible gatherings is guiding the future of meetings and events. Associations can foster more socially responsible meetings and events by participating in social procurement, engaging with local communities, and by electing for responsible venues and destinations.

## Delivering Responsible Meetings Through Social Procurement

Social procurement has the potential to create meaningful change from events and conferences. Understanding that every purchase has a broad impact—from economic, social, cultural, and environmental implications—social procurement aims to bring intentional and positive value through existing purchases. In addition to maximizing financial value, it means using procurement to achieve broader organizational goals, including environmental and social sustainability.

Association professionals can participate in social procurement by partnering with local organizations, purchasing from recognized social enterprises, and engaging small businesses for conference items.

## Engaging Local Communities

Based in Vancouver BC, Binners' Project is a social enterprise that assists in managing waste generated from event venues and reduces the stigma waste-pickers face as informal recyclable collectors. The fee-for-service waste-sorting program achieves the triple benefit of social inclusion, economic development, and waste diversion: the program helps build community resilience, provides a fair income to binners, and helps organizations achieve sustainability goals by diverting waste from landfills.

In intentionally acting for positive social value through the purchase of goods and services, organizations can contribute positively to their local community.

## Delivering Responsible Meetings at Responsible Venues—and Destinations

Selecting responsible host and venue destinations can be one of the principal decisions when working towards responsible meetings (HQ, 2023). Doing so helps promote more holistic and responsible events, as associated suppliers and practices align with the destination and venue's sustainability measures.

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*"When you practice social procurement, you intentionally create community capital based on the needs of the local community. Through multi-stakeholder engagement processes, communities can identify the social, economic, cultural, and environmental issues that are important to them"*

— Buy Social Canada's Guide to Social Procurement in Tourism, Hospitality, and Events





Certifications like LEED® can help clients find venues that align with their ESG targets. LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) is an environmental standard used to rate healthy, efficient, and cost-saving green buildings. Developed by the U.S. Green Building Council, LEED is a globally recognized rating system that integrates tangible benefits and demonstrates a building's commitment to Environmental, Social, and Governance goals.

Located in the heart of Downtown Vancouver, the Vancouver Convention Centre is the first convention centre in the world to achieve double LEED® Platinum Certification. The Vancouver Convention Centre's Platinum designation was achieved in part through its waste management, energy efficiency, indoor water use reduction, and facility maintenance: the centre boasts a six-acre living roof, a seawater heating and cooling system, and an integrated restored marine habitat.

As the birthplace of Greenpeace and home to the burgeoning cleantech sector, Vancouver continues to act as a hub for environmental

leadership, collaboration, and innovation. With the smallest per capita carbon footprint in North America, Vancouver strives to build a sustainable and resilient industry, with commitments to the stewardship and renewal of the natural environment. The city continues its advancements towards a greener future, with green economy firms working towards advancing green buildings, clean transportation, and renewable and low carbon fuels through cleantech.

## Beyond Financials: The Legacy and Impact of Responsible Conferences

While conferences have a substantial financial impact on host destinations, their lasting benefits extend far beyond attendance numbers, beds, space, and consumption of convention services. A study conducted by Capilano University's Center for Tourism Research—The Capilano University Conference Legacy Impact Study—confirmed that the impacts of conferences go beyond pure economic means.

Through the Conference Legacy Impact Study's analysis of five Vancouver-hosted conferences, 47 short-term outcomes (the actions that delegates perform following a business event) were identified, contributing to economic, environmental, political, social, and sectoral benefits. These results illustrate the significance in hosting responsible meetings for delegates and for host destinations. In hosting responsible conferences, destinations can—and do—create diverse transformational impact beyond purely economic means.

**: In hosting responsible conferences,  
: destinations can—and do—create  
: diverse transformational impact  
: beyond purely economic means.**

Embracing sustainable and responsible meeting practices can help associations match the trends and demands facing organizations. In embracing social procurement, pursuing environmentally conscious venues, and engaging with local communities, associations can achieve holistic impacts for both host destinations and for conference attendees.

Conference stakeholders can find more actionable steps to link positive change to their conference procurement process through Buy Social Canada's Guide to Social Procurement in Tourism, Hospitality and Events. [\[1\]](#)

This article is powered  
by **Excelerate Partner:**  
**Destination Vancouver**



**SARAH GRAVELINE**

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# Adult Learning Theory:

A GUIDEPOST  
FOR CREATING  
AN ENGAGING  
TRIAD MENTOR  
PROGRAM



*By Alison Powers, MBA*

**L**earning programs, such as workshops and seminars, are key components of nearly every professional association and one of the primary membership benefits that bring members back year after year.

**Today's savvy associations are expanding their educational portfolio beyond seminars and workshops to include mentoring programs that combine adult learning principles with skill-building, networking, and professional knowledge into a small, personalized package for three members.**

Considered by some as a concierge approach to learning, these unique three-person mentoring relationships connect professionals new to the field with seasoned experts and experienced practitioners somewhere in the middle. The triads work together for one year, each participant serving at times as a mentor or a mentee, depending on the participants' needs.<sup>1</sup> Traditionally, the seasoned participants have the most experience, about 10 years in the field, while the early career professional has the least, usually less than five years, and the mid-level career professional is somewhere in between.



Mentoring relationships play a key role in the advancement of a person's professional and personal goals. It is well known that having more than one mentor is more effective. The American College of Surgeons Young Fellows Association (ACS YFA) created a triad mentoring program to better address the needs of all surgeons. According to their mentor guide, each member of the triad, with similar years of experience as described above, will each experience three stages of growth during their year-long relationship:

- Exploration
- Exploring their issues and needs
- Understanding
- Gaining a greater understanding of their unique areas of need
- Action planning, utilizing creative approaches to overcome issues and barriers of their growth

Centered around adult learning principles akin to those espoused by Malcolm Knowles, participants, regardless of their status in the professional association or the field itself, assume the role of mentee and mentor during the relationship, depending on their needs.

When married with the principles of the Humanist Learning Theory and a tried-and-true mentoring curriculum, this unique triad relationship encourages disparate members to share knowledge, insights into the profession, and perspectives on challenging situations. A mentor program that expands beyond the traditional mentor pair and connects three or more members at different experience levels can be a highly effective way to help members grow and develop their skills.

Being a mentor and a mentee simultaneously is valuable because it allows individuals to gain insights from different perspectives and develop a deeper understanding of their strengths and weaknesses. As a mentor, an individual can share their knowledge,

skills, and expertise with their mentees in complex situations. As a mentee, participants can learn new ideas, skills, and perspectives from their mentors. This dual-role approach to learning can help individuals improve their communication, leadership, and problem-solving skills, ultimately leading to personal and professional growth for all parties involved.

Adult learners have unique characteristics that differ from the way children learn and should be considered when designing a mentor program. Malcolm Knowles's theory of adult learning emphasizes that adult learners are self-directed and want to be treated as equals. He recognized that they bring a wealth of experience and knowledge to the learning process and want to apply what they learn to real-life situations. By keeping these characteristics in mind, professional associations can develop an effective and engaging mentor program.

Because Knowles' theory emphasizes the importance of relevance and practical application of learning, applying this principle

**: Mentoring  
: relationships  
: play a key  
: role in the  
: advancement  
: of a person's  
: professional  
: and personal  
: goals.**



to a mentoring program can ensure it is effective in helping mentees apply what they learned to their careers, leading to a more engaging and successful membership base. At the same time, the association is fostering a culture of growth and support within the association, which undoubtedly will maintain strong membership retention rates.

Associations exist to provide value to their members, and for many associations, networking and education are among the top three benefits of membership. By providing continuing education opportunities and personalized mentor programs, professional associations help their members stay competitive, strengthening their skills, expertise, and confidence while identifying potential leaders to serve within the association.



### HOW DOES THE ASSOCIATION BENEFIT?

The benefits of a mentorship program for the association are numerous. For instance, the program can help the association build a stronger brand, attract new members, and showcase its commitment to the growth and development of its members.

In addition, mentorship programs can help the association identify and develop future leaders. When experienced members mentor newer members, they pass on their knowledge, skills, and expertise. This benefits not only the mentee but also the association by creating a pool of potential leaders who can take the association forward.

### HOW DO THE MEMBERS BENEFIT?

Mentorship programs can be highly beneficial for members. They offer a platform for members to learn from experience, gain new skills, and build their networks. In addition, mentorship programs can help members stay motivated and engaged with the association. Members who feel that their association is invested in their growth are more likely to remain active and engaged.

In conclusion, mentorship programs can benefit both professional associations and their members. By investing in such programs, associations can create a culture of learning and growth, which can help them stay relevant and attract and retain members.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Knowles, M. (1990). "The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species" (4 ed.). Houston: Gulf Publishing.



*By investing in mentorship programs, associations can create a culture of learning and growth, which can help them stay relevant and attract and retain members.*



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# HOW PSYCHSUMMIT CREATED

## An Engaging & Collaborative Digital Experience for Members

Every organization wants their digital initiatives to be successful.

**P**psychSummit stands out as a dynamic learning experience that has been successful in facilitating virtual connection, conversation, and collaboration across the psychiatric profession.

Initially its goal was to bring together experts from around the country to start conversations on cutting-edge topics with the aim of sparking change, later developing to focus on brainstorming and developing solutions to real world challenges. In 2023, PsychSummit has taken the next step to create change in the world by implementing these solutions—thanks to innovative event design, passionate leadership, and the collaboration of professionals from over 30 states.

This award-winning digital initiative, co-created by New York County Psychiatric Society (NYCPS) and Colorado Psychiatric Society (CPS), launched in 2019. The focus for 2023 was “Reimagining Correctional Psychiatry,” while topics in past years have included climate change, Covid-19, and the opioid crisis.

### Purpose-built for Active Participation

Successful digital initiatives begin with identifying desired outcomes for all stakeholders. Then the digital experience is intentionally designed to enhance opportunities for active engagement and meaningful participation.

Anna Weaver, MA, CAE, Executive Director of CPS, describes PsychSummit as “empowering participants to design the future by facilitating connections across the country and the globe, starting important and often challenging conversations, and exchanging ideas to spark change.” PsychSummit offers multiple engagement opportunities:

- Every session opens with a short, thought-provoking talk by an expert. Often educational content related to the topic is available to access in advance in the platform, such as pre-event videos, published papers by the speaker, or related literature.

By Michelle Brien



MICHELLE BRIEN

MICHELLE IS VP  
MARKETING AT  
MATCHBOX.

- **Organizers have successfully**
- **attracted support from psychiatry**
- **experts, industry partners, and**
- **participants.**

This gets people thinking critically about the “problem” and means attendees come ready to actively participate in discussions.

- Sessions are built around designing solutions through the lens of the psychiatric perspective to move the needle on major societal challenges. Attendees are encouraged to participate in brainstorming potential solutions and then designing initiatives to implement those solutions.

**This interactive approach engages attendees and creates a sense of ownership and belonging, through active collaboration.**

- At the end of the recent series on mental health in correctional facilities, attendees were polled asking their interest in participating in working groups to move the most viable ideas forward. Incredibly, 100% of attendees polled said they wanted to participate in working groups.

**This is testament to the value created by PsychSummit in addressing real challenges for their profession, providing access to experts, and supporting the co-creation of solutions.**

The PsychSummit organizers are always pushing the envelope to make their events more engaging, changing the format over the years as event modalities have evolved. The current format was inspired by a virtual networking incubator run by PsychSummit's strategic partner, Matchbox. The organizers saw the opportunity to use similar facilitation practices over a series of nine events to lead to real problem-solving and collaboration, as Meagan O'Toole, JD, CAE, Executive Director of NYCPS, outlines:

“PsychSummit has evolved over the years and we're excited about the results this fostered last year. The new, more interactive format allowed us to truly tap into the expertise across the country. You no longer have to wait for a bi-annual national meeting to get the right people in the room to get things done.”

Adaptability is key to staying relevant and effective in the digital realm. Whether it's refining session formats or introducing new elements based on audience feedback or new technologies, continuous iteration ensures the ongoing success of your digital initiatives.

## Creating Value and Celebrating Success

Some of the key outcomes from PsychSummit 2023 show how the organizers have successfully attracted support from psychiatry experts, industry partners, and participants to ensure its success:

- A dedicated advisory group of experts, who are all volunteers, helped to make the series successful—consulting, supporting discussions, and participating in breakout rooms during the ideation process. They also created a promotional video that emphasized the interactive format and benefits of participating.
- PsychSummit is financially sustainable. Sponsors have stayed with the event since its inception, evolving with them and trusting their vision.
- The platform, in addition to hosting the initial sessions and providing collaborative workspaces, also tracks solutions so all participants can watch their progress out in the real world. For example, there were celebrations recently when The American Psychiatric Association (APA) Assembly passed an action paper on language used in “correctional” psychiatry. This is just one of several solutions being implemented from the 2023 series.

By designing PsychSummit in a purpose-driven way, NYCPS and CPS have built not just a virtual event, but an excellent example of a successful and strategic digital initiative. The value PsychSummit provides to participants is evidenced by its growth and evolution over the years and its positive impact on challenges faced by psychiatrists and persons with mental illness. [F](#)



Interested in learning more about how digital initiatives can help associations grow revenue and engage members? Scan the QR code and register for the webinar on May 16!

This article was powered by Healthcare Collaborative partner: Matchbox 



# AI: Legal Considerations

*By Susan Feingold Carlson, JD*

**Q. My association is starting to experiment with artificial intelligence technologies like ChatGPT, Bing AI and Google Bard. Are there legal issues in which we should be mindful?**

**A. While AI technologies can have a positive impact on associations by enhancing efficiency, automating repetitive tasks, and improving decision-making processes, their use also presents potential risks and pitfalls. Among other things, associations should consider data privacy concerns, intellectual property considerations, and AI reliability/accuracy when deciding whether and how to use AI.**

## Data Privacy

Advanced AI technologies that enable machines to generate new, original content autonomously, referred to as “generative AI,” offer quick and low-cost content creation. They can create diverse outputs, including text, images, and videos, as well as financial reports, business plans, and even medical diagnoses. To generate those outputs, however, the AI technology must be “fed” relevant inputs, such as financial figures, personal data, and other non-public and potentially confidential information. To date, AI creators (such as OpenAI and Google) have not disclosed how they handle user-fed information. In addition, the accounts used to create such content exist on the Internet and, as such, are subject to hacking. Thus, associations that upload confidential and other sensitive association and member information to those

technologies risk compromising the security of that data and expose themselves to potential legal and reputational damage should a data breach occur.

## Intellectual Property

AI technologies also raise several potential intellectual property concerns, in terms of both AI-generated content and existing association-created and -owned content. With respect to the former, the U.S. Copyright Office has begun to publish guidance about works containing material generated by AI. That guidance makes clear that, to be eligible for copyright registration, a “work” must have a human author. The exact extent to which a human must be involved in the creation of the work, however, remains an open question. For now, AI-generated works are generally consid-

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*As AI rapidly evolves with the potential to transform industries...associations, should understand how it works, the advantages it offers, and the limitations on its scope.*

ered not copyrightable—although the issue is not yet settled.

In addition, the “large language models” that typically serve as the base for AI-generated content contain information from publicly available data sets that may include copyrighted works. As a result, it is possible that the AI-generated content may infringe on works used in its creation. Because of the lack of transparency as to the vast material that is the basis for the AI content, it may be difficult to detect or prevent the creation or use of infringing works, and associations generating content using AI programs risk litigation and penalties for such infringement.

As a related concern, if the underlying content and data in AI models contain an association’s own intellectual property, the AI-generated content would infringe on that property. Thus, it is imperative that associations keep track of how their data is accessed through AI and be vigilant of others infringing their works.

### **Data Bias**

In addition to strict legal issues, AI technologies also raise certain ethical issues, particularly with respect to potential bias. Because the underlying data that form the basis for AI content is unknown, it may include bias. In processing the data, AI also may develop its own bias, often referred to as “algorithmic bias.” Associations need to be mindful of those risks, as data bias and algorithmic bias could result in discrimination.

Finally, associations should understand that certain actions by association employees and independent contractors using AI may exacerbate their legal risks. The most obvious concern is employees and contractors using AI and passing the work off as their own. Such action raises the copyright questions discussed above, potential plagiarism concerns, and “quality control” issues. As to the last, it is important to

understand that AI sometimes “hallucinates,” a phenomenon in which the AI creates incorrect “facts” that it relies on in generating answers. Such hallucinations may result in inaccurate or non-existent legal authority, citations, and data for legal briefs and scientific research papers, or incorrect trivia question answers. To the extent an association inadvertently publishes hallucinations, it may suffer reputational damage and/or business liability. Thus, associations should know the source of the information used in their publications and fact check as much as reasonably possible.

To manage the risks of AI, associations should consider adopting policies regarding its use. It is important that such policies address a broad range of relevant issues, including, for example, (i) the types and sources of association-held data that may be used to “feed” AI technologies; (ii) the types of content that may be created using AI technologies; (iii) the specific technologies that staff, independent contractors, and volunteers may use for purposes of creating content; and (iv) the oversight that will be put in place to monitor use of AI by employees, independent contractors, and other content creators.

As AI rapidly evolves with the potential to transform industries, everyone, including associations, should understand how it works, the advantages it offers, and the limitations on its scope. Such understanding will aid in maximizing the benefits and minimizing the risks associated with its use. [E](#)

*Edited by Jed Mandel*



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**SUSAN FEINGOLD CARLSON, JD**

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SUSAN IS A FOUNDING MEMBER OF CHICAGO LAW PARTNERS, LLC. CLP SERVES AS THE ASSOCIATION FORUM’S GENERAL COUNSEL.

## How do you Empower Those Around You?

**W**e hope reading this issue of FORUM Magazine has made you feel Empowered by Proximity. Your Forum membership puts you in a prime position to be empowered by this amazing network. We asked association professionals how they empower others. Read on for their answers!

“As a professional insurance agent specializing in working with association and nonprofits, I empower those around me by providing comprehensive, tailored insurance solutions that address their unique needs and challenges. Through educating and guiding association executives on their risk management and coverage options, I enable them to make informed decisions, ensuring they feel confident and in control of their insurance program and have a reliable insurance agent to lean on as well.”



• **Brian C. Lynch, CLCS, MLIS**  
• Partner & Asst. Vice President  
• Ames & Gough



“At MCI we really value and encourage our talents to participate in learning opportunities and mentorship programs at all levels. Taking the reigns on your own development that is supported by the company empowers our talents to create their own path and career trajectory.”

• **Tracy Schorle, MA**  
• Associate Vice President Advisory Services  
• MCI

“Recently, I implemented an empowering leadership style in the workplace and in my volunteer board leadership roles. I find it important to influence employee creativity and honor citizenship staff behavior. Moreover, I work towards understanding organizational behavior, but I prioritize and execute on my professional values.”



• **José A. Marroquin, M.B.A, M.A. (He/Him)**  
• Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Manager  
• Society of Actuaries



“Allowing them to make their own mistakes and learn from them. So often, we want to train in such a way that it’s exactly what we do, but that doesn’t necessarily allow for deep learning and

understanding to occur. When you’re not afraid of another’s mistakes, they have the freedom to grow and improve in a way that helps them build their knowledge and understanding, and they increase their ability to problem solve.”

- **Louise Pereyra**
- Governance Program Manager
- Staff Liaison to the ASPS/PSF Board of Directors
- and Council of Representatives
- American Society of Plastic Surgeons

“I empower those around me by reflecting on my own actions and contributions to the well-being and growth of the people in my personal and professional circle. I encourage open communication and create a space where everyone feels heard and valued while sharing my experiences to help them navigate their careers in hopes that they reach their full potential. I actively seek opportunities for personal growth, recognizing that my development contributes to the overall empowerment of the team.”



- **JoAnna Leon**
- Director
- WERC Membership & MHI-CICMHE



To effectively empower my peers, I prioritize fostering an environment of open communication, where everyone feels at ease to express their thoughts. By actively listening and consistently encouraging open dialogue, I aim to create a supportive and inclusive atmosphere that nurtures self expression and idea sharing. It is about creating an environment where they can discover and harness their own strengths and potential.

- **Sherry Budziak**
- CEO, .orgSource
- Co-Founder, .orgCommunity





“Perhaps the most impactful form of empowerment I offer to those around me is making sure that they feel heard. When they share their ideas, concerns or project goals, I encourage them to

act, and I stand alongside them to show our clients that I support them. We also ensure that all team members are treated with kindness. On the rare occasion that our team was treated poorly, we have gone so far as to step away from those particular projects.”

• **Melissa M. Lagowski**  
• CEO/Founder/Queen Bee  
• Big Buzz Idea Group



“We empower our staff by investing in education and professional development. CAI-IL budgets an education allowance for each staff member, pays for the executive director to attend the CAI national conference and the conference for executive directors and subscribes to LinkedIn Learning. Each staff member receives an individualized learning plan each year that coincides with their learning and career goals and there is quarterly education about topics that affect all staff members.”

• **Ania Drechsler, CAE**  
• Finance & Administrative Manager  
• Community Associations Institute—IL Chapter

*“We know that great work is never done in a vacuum. It takes mentors, resources, and opportunities to advance. Empowered by Proximity is all about accessing those resources—and creating opportunities that will empower us to break through barriers and find our true potential.”*

— Artesha Moore, FASAE, CAE, President & CEO Association Forum

*By Mark Vaughan, FASAE*

## The Company You Keep

I can't believe I'm writing these words, but I am now three months into retirement. More than 40 years of my life was spent working in various areas of the hospitality industry, the most recent 18 years at Atlanta Convention & Visitors Bureau. It was in this role that I really began meaningful work with associations. I've seen firsthand how the association community can influence and change a destination just by holding a meeting within the city. Associations create jobs. They develop entrepreneurship and they bring people together. The charitable work that associations provide to destinations is immeasurable.

So, when I think about the theme 'Empowered by Proximity', it really rings true in so many areas of the association world. We determine our proximity by what we choose to surround ourselves with. It's up to us to determine how to get the most out of ourselves—and each other—by placing ourselves in the best surroundings.

The most important area to me is DEI. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are powerful, and we can't be empowered in these areas unless we are immersed in them. DEI is critical to success within associations, and this is a topic I have been passionate about throughout my career. When I joined ACVB in 2005, I started to understand more about the people that make up the city's hospitality industry. It's a community of great diversity, which is just one reason I loved being a part of it. I've tried to be a proponent for diversity and inclusion not only when it comes to welcoming visitors, but also to those who are employed within our industry. During my tenure at ACVB, I was fortunate enough to work with a host of wonderful colleagues from diverse backgrounds, many of whom advanced their careers within our organization and hospitality community to take on a variety of leadership positions. The dynamic perspective a diverse leadership team brings to an association is what sets the best apart from the pack.



MARK VAUGHAN AND HIS WIFE CHERYL SHARE A PASSION FOR UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY BASKETBALL. THEY ENJOYED WATCHING THE WILDCATS BEAT NORTH CAROLINA AT STATE FARM ARENA IN ATLANTA DEC. 16, 2023.

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*We determine our proximity by what we choose to surround ourselves with. It's up to us to determine how to get the most out of ourselves—and each other—by placing ourselves in the best surroundings.*

I also think it is critical to get off the bench and be active within the association community—and even beyond that. While my interactions with associations were minimal in the early parts of my career, they became more frequent as I understood the importance of these groups which changed the course of my career. Over the years, I became an ambassador for Association Forum and ultimately served on its board of directors. It helped me broaden my perspectives, reach, and areas of expertise.

Your work with associations is also extremely valuable to other organizations, which is why it is also important to volunteer your talent and efforts. This benefits communities and impacts causes that affect change and make a real difference in the lives of others. I strongly believe you have to be involved at the local level to make change in your own backyard. I challenge those that I mentor to be involved in their community and invest in their profession, and I've practiced what I preach by volunteering and serving on as many different boards and groups as possible.

But no matter which stage of my career I reflect upon, I was always empowered by people. The work was important, but the people I surrounded myself with made the difference. I shared the same values of the association community regarding professional development and was lucky enough to have some outstanding mentors as I advanced throughout my career. Many people poured into me, and I'm so passionate about doing the same for the next generation.



During the weeks leading up to my retirement, I heard from a lot of people I've encountered over the years about the great work I accomplished. In reality, it was the great team around me that made it happen. If you hire the best talent and trust them in their roles, you'll never lose. Surround yourself with great people. Make sure you are impacting DEI in your organization and give back to associations and your community. You will be destined to empower yourself and others by the company you keep. [F](#)

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**MARK VAUGHAN, FASAE**

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RETIRED EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT AND CHIEF SALES OFFICER, ATLANTA CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU, FORMER MEMBER OF ASSOCIATION FORUM'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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