



AEP 2025 CONFERENCE SESSION ABSTRACTS

DAY 1: SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2025

9:00am – Keynote Presentation

Wolfe Theater

Robert Hickey, The Washington School of Protocol

Protocol Fundamentals when Elected and High-Appointed Officials Visit

- Precedence: How precedence is established and on what it has an effect
- Flag fundamentals: Display of one or two flags at an event. (I am not going to get into outdoor and multinational displays)
- Forms of address: In writing & conversation: (In a program, letter, citation, formal introduction, or conversation.)
- Questions and Answers

10:15am – Breakout Session 1

Room 155

Stephanie Smith & Kelsey Menefee, Missouri State University

Bridging Tradition and Innovation: A Presidential Inauguration for Missouri State

This presentation celebrates the success of Missouri State University's recent presidential inauguration, which beautifully blended the university's rich traditions with a forward-looking vision for the future. The event featured the voices of university representatives and students, whose contributions made the celebration a true reflection of the Missouri State community. World premiere musical performances by student groups and performers added a unique and inspiring touch, marking the beginning of an exciting new chapter for the university as we look ahead to a bright and promising future.

Room 223

Matt Thomson, Ohio State University

Eliminating Mediocre Experiences, One Event at a Time

This interactive session will explore the common pitfalls that lead to mediocre events and provide practical strategies for creating unforgettable experiences. Attendees

will learn how to innovate their planning processes, engage participants more effectively, and ensure their events leave a lasting impact.

Objectives:

- Identify key factors that contribute to mediocre event experiences.
- Provide actionable strategies for enhancing engagement and satisfaction.
- Encourage collaboration and idea-sharing among participants.

Target Audience

- Event planners and coordinators
- Marketing professionals
- Venue managers
- Corporate event organizers

Room 221

Carrie Fox, University of the Pacific

Sustainably Smart Events – Reduce, Reuse, Recycle...Secrets of the Bottom Line

This session will do a deep dive into what it takes to really cut out those extra expenses and be environmentally friendly when it comes to the event design and execution. The success of an event should go beyond one's enjoyment... it should inspire, provoke thought and be on the forefront of sustainable practices. By looking at everything from evergreen signage to shared decor and compostable materials, innovative menus and regenerative florals...we will explore it all! Simple steps can leave measurable marks on the overall success of the event; ensuring we are being mindful throughout the full scope of our event footprint.

11:30am – General Session

Wolfe Theater

Jim Hooker, AEP Chair & Richard Davies, DRPG

It Starts With...Creating an Immersive Landmark Experience

If you work in academic events for an extended period, you will be responsible for executing landmark celebrations. Whether producing commencement, an institutional anniversary, welcoming a globally recognized VIP, or launching a campaign initiative, these experiences are regular occurrences in academia. Topics and questions to be addressed:

- What is an Immersive Landmark Experience and what is its purpose?
- Understanding why STRATEGY is the most important word in planning.
- Who are the audiences and how are they integrated into the event while also being communicated to directly?
- What is meant by “expected takeaways”?
- Learn why the latest technologies can enhance your messaging and the event.
- Examples of immersive academic experiences and how they resonate with constituencies.

Questions and open discussion are encouraged in this session.

1:30pm – Breakout Session 2

Room 155

Jihan Lang, Spelman College

Unleash Your Dream Team: Transform Students into Powerhouse Ambassadors!

In the fast-paced realm of Advancement, the demands are soaring, and your team faces a pivotal choice – burnout or build. Picture this: limited budget, no room for team expansion. What's your move? Join our dynamic conference session for an exhilarating dive into unleashing your hottest commodity – students! Learn innovative strategies to: harness their potential, lighten your workload, showcase their talent, and cultivate super alum ambassadors, steering your institution towards an unstoppable future. It's time to transform challenges into opportunities – ignite the power within your team and set the stage for success! 🔥

#TeamTransformation #StudentPower #InstitutionalSuccess

Room 223

Sponsor Discovery – A Deep Dive into Products that Shape Academic Events

This session immerses attendees in relevant products that support academic events. Whether providing digital services, physical merchandise, or on-site expertise, these companies assist academic institutions across the globe.

- 42 Chat – Event Communication Platform (Professor bot at AEP)
- Balfour & co. – Institutional Jewelry, Yearbooks, Letter Jackets, Grad Products
- StageClip – Personalized Video Clips for Alumni Engagements and Graduations

Room 221

Kyla Dunn & Liz Ronecker, University of Missouri

Golden Gala: Crafting a Multi-Faceted Celebration of Ginger Rogers

In today's dynamic landscape, successful events must cater to multiple audiences and work with a variety of partners. This session will explore a case study of the Weekend of Ginger at the University of Missouri that successfully integrated various components: a fashion exhibition, movie screening, and gala that celebrated Missouri native and film icon Ginger Rogers. Learn to identify and target different audience segments, creating a cohesive experience and how to work with a variety of partners – students, advancement, and vendors.

2:45pm – Breakout Session 3

Room 155

Matt Sampson, Purdue University

Project Blank Space: The Eras tour of Women in STEM

Capitalizing on the dynamic audience in town for three nights of the Taylor Swift Eras Tour, Purdue University created a pop-up experience highlighting women in STEM, all

themed around the icon herself. The goal of the events was to inspire and encourage young women to pursue STEM fields and degrees, particularly at Purdue University. A mix of recruitment, engagement, and a whole lot of shimmer.

Room 223

Sara Freeman, Rowan University

Breaking Down Silos: Elevating Events through Strategic Collaboration

Ready to transform how your university handles events? This session will provide practical strategies for uniting event planners, resource departments, and vendors through effective collaboration. Attendees will learn how to dismantle the traditional silos that hinder communication and create a more cohesive approach to event planning within higher education.

Key takeaways include:

- Build a dynamic Event Professionals Network that fosters collaboration, innovation, and shared resources.
- Engage essential campus partners—including advancement, student life, admissions, facilities, police and parking services, catering, academic scheduling, —ensuring a seamless, 360-degree event planning process.
- Implement powerful communication strategies and practical templates that bring clarity, consistency, and efficiency to your event planning process.

Whether you're a seasoned event planner or new to the field, this session will equip you with actionable insights to break down barriers, streamline your planning process, and leave a lasting impact.

Room 221

Rich Davies, DRPG

Storytelling Through Technology

The creation of engaging and memorable events requires more than just traditional methods. In this session we'll discuss some of the latest technologies reshaping how we connect with our audiences, but more importantly, how we harness that tech to create meaningful experiences and storytelling that resonate with our audience. We'll explore next-gen ideas, interactive tools, cool future trends and the role of AI-driven analytics in all of this - personalizing event experiences and creating deeper connections.

This session includes:

- The art of storytelling & human behavior
- Understanding audience behavior
- Data - how it's changed, more accessible and useable
- 3-4 emerging technologies and how they create experiences
- Augmenting data and technologies
- What can you do today?

Takeaways:

- Understand that technology shouldn't be deployed for 'tech's sake', but to enrich storytelling and a greater audience experience.
- Learn about new technologies, or if not new, how to maximize their potential.
- Realize the true potential of real-time data in live events.

4:00pm – Breakout Session 4

These breakouts are designed to share ideas and provide open discussions on various academic event topics. Today's open discussion will focus on Student Events, Athletic Events, and Ceremonies. Sessions will be moderated by a member of the AEP Advisory Board. Please attend the room based on your student body size.

Room 155

Carrie Fox, University of the Pacific

Small Sized Institution Open Discussion (up to 6,000 students)

Room 223

Andrea Elaver, Appalachian State University & Jennifer O'Sheal, Seton Hall University

Medium Sized Institution Open Discussion (between 6,000 and 20,000 students)

Room 221

Jill Townsend, University of California, San Diego

Large Sized Institution Open Discussion (20,000+ students)

Wolfe Theater

Jim Hooker, AEP Chair & Melissa Goitia, Arizona State University

C-Suite (for event managers/directors with 8+ years' experience)

DAY 2: MONDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2025

9:30am – Breakout Session 1

Room 155

Vanessa Vasquez & Merary Nieves, Florida International University

Introducing a University-Wide Centralized Process for Events

Coordinating events across numerous locations with various reservation processes and multiple service providers can be challenging in a large institution. Learn how Florida International University created a centralized process for managing events across multiple campuses.

Room 223

Sponsor Discovery – A Deep Dive into Products that Shape Academic Events

This session immerses attendees in relevant products that support academic events. Whether providing digital services, physical merchandise, or on-site expertise, these companies assist academic institutions across the globe.

- BBJ LaTavola – Linen and Tabletop Rentals
- TSEC – Strategic Academic Event Planning & Communication
- SpotMyPhotos – Facial Recognition Special Event Photography

Room 221

Angela Lamon & Nancy Huemer, Barnard College

Building Bridges: Collaborative Strategies for Alumni and Donor Engagement Across Campus

Ready to transform how your university handles events? This session will provide practical strategies for uniting event planners, resource departments, and vendors through effective collaboration. Attendees will learn how to dismantle the traditional silos that hinder communication and create a more cohesive approach to event planning within higher education.

Key takeaways include:

- Build a dynamic Event Professionals Network that fosters collaboration, innovation, and shared resources.
- Engage essential campus partners—including advancement, student life, admissions, facilities, police and parking services, catering and academic scheduling—ensuring a seamless, 360-degree event planning process.
- Implement powerful communication strategies and practical templates that bring clarity, consistency, and efficiency to your event planning process.

Whether you're a seasoned event planner or new to the field, this session will equip you with actionable insights to break down barriers, streamline your planning process, and leave a lasting impact.

10:45am – General Session

Wolfe Theater

Police Chief Alexander Casas & Jehnny Rivera, Florida International University

Security Threats, Risk and the Unexpected at Academic Events

Join FIU Police Chief and FIU's Executive Director of University Ceremonies and Events as they examine the many security and safety challenges that face events on campus, on the road, or out of the country. From identifying threats and disturbances to protecting the health and well-being of your guests due to natural occurrences, this session will focus on what you need to consider, and what you need to know when planning your next event.

11:45am – Idea Gallery

Explore the many ways your colleagues at different institutions position their institution brand to their constituents. From invitation designs, donor gifts, branded items and other marketing materials, discover how creative you can be!

1:00pm – Breakout Session 2

These breakouts are designed to share ideas and provide open discussions on various academic event topics. Today's open discussion will focus on Development Events, Presidential Events and Reputational Events. Sessions will be moderated by a member of the AEP Advisory Board. Please attend the room based on your student body size.

Room 155

Carrie Fox, University of the Pacific

Small Sized Institution Open Discussion (up to 6,000 students)

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C-Suite (for event managers/directors with 8+ years' experience)

2:15pm – Breakout Session 3

Room 155

Rachel Janicki & Tamanna Tasmin, Illinois State University

From Idea to Execution: Team Dynamics in Event Project Management

This presentation explores how the success of an event hinges on effective team dynamics and robust project management at every step, especially when resources are limited, highlighting how a united team can innovate despite constraints, ultimately transforming challenges into opportunities.

Attendees will learn practical strategies for managing communication, setting clear goals and expectations, and leveraging the strengths of each team-member. Real-world examples will illustrate how effective planning and communication can streamline processes, reduce misunderstandings, and enhance overall event success. Discover actionable insights that empower event coordinators to cultivate resilient teams capable of delivering outstanding events, even in resource-challenged environments.

Room 223

Bill Hansen, Florida International University & Dewey LoSasso, Bill Hansen Catering

Trusting Your Catering Partner: Understanding the Why, What and How?

How well do you as an event planner understand the value of the partnership with your caterer? A close and trusted relationship can make or break your event, and your job, if there is not a clear understanding of the process or outcomes for an event. This session is designed to enhance your skills client/caterer communication skills, making you the best event professional you can be.

Takeaways:

- Why Trust Matters – Bad Choices and Good Choices
 - Setting the Tone for Success – Catering is often the Backbone of an Event
 - Peace of Mind – Be a Guest at Your Own Event
 - Consistency & Reliability – Expecting the Unexpected
- What to Look for in a Catering Partner
 - Questions to Ask
 - Tasting – The Good, The Bad and The Ugly
 - Service Expectations
 - Communication Skills
- How to Build and Maintain Trust with your Catering Partner

Room 221

Melissa Goitia, Arizona State University & Jehnny Rivera, Florida International University

Academic Event Protocol: What You Should Know

With the variety of academic events and ceremonies colleges and universities host, the protocol of staging, introductions, titles, and more can feel daunting. This session will focus on the intricate details of protocol in academia, and it will provide insights on how protocol helps to standardize your events throughout the university.

3:30pm – General Session

Wolfe Theater

Jill Townsend, University of California, San Diego

Lance Connolly, Purdue University

Monica Glover, Elon University

Matthew Regan, Emerson College

Hayley Houston, Boston University

Experts Panel General Discussion and Q&A

Join these veteran academic event producers in an open discussion on best practices on a multitude of academic event topics. This is your last chance to ask the questions you still are looking to have answered. Always guaranteed to be one of the liveliest sessions at the AEP Conference!