

2026 AEP Conference Speaker Profiles



Missy Arendash

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, William F. Harrah College of Hospitality
Director of Events & Engagement

Missy Arendash is the Director of Events & Engagement at the UNLV Harrah College of Hospitality, where she produces high-impact experiences for students, alumni, donors, and industry leaders. With over a decade of experience in higher education and event strategy, she specializes in creative, student-centered programming that builds connection and drives enrollment. Missy is the lead architect behind UNLV's Innovative Hospitality Exploration Summer Camp, and also manages signature events like UNLVino and the Vallen Dinner of Distinction. She is passionate about using events as a platform for storytelling, connection, and creating unforgettable moments that leave a lasting impact.



Rachel Ash

Colgate University

Associate Director, Office of University Events

Rachel Ash is the Associate Director of University Events at Colgate University, where she brings over 10 years of experience in event strategy and organization, as well as meetings and conference management. In her current role, Rachel takes a collaborative approach to creating meaningful experiences at university-wide events, including Commencement, Convocation, Homecoming, Reunion, Presidential-hosted events, as well as campaign-focused announcements and celebrations. Recently, she also completed her training as a Protocol Officer through the Protocol School of Washington®.



Laurel Belman
University of Wisconsin, Madison
Event Manager

Laurel Belman plans and executes UW-Madison's Division of Information Technology (DoIT) internal and external events and meetings. Some annual events include the DoIT All Staff Meeting, IT Professionals Conference, IT Support Symposium, and IT Leadership Conference. Unique events include a series of CIO Listening Sessions, DoIT 30th Anniversary Celebration, and the "Envision the Future" workshop series. Laurel earned her B.A. in History from Lawrence University and M.A. in Museum Studies from the University of Leicester. Before DoIT, she planned and executed events at the UW-Madison Law School, Kansas Museum of History, and Smithsonian National Museum of American History.



Jordan Brantley-Prewitt
University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Senior Director of Athletic Events and Partnerships

Jordan Brantley-Prewitt is the Senior Director of Athletic Events and Partnerships for the University of Tennessee Alumni Relations team, where they bring energy, creativity, and strategy to every game day experience. Jordan leads the charge in planning and executing large-scale athletic events that connect fans, donors, and partners through the shared pride of the Power T. With more than a decade of experience in event design and management, Jordan specializes in creating meaningful, mission-driven experiences that celebrate tradition, elevate engagement, and showcase the impact of collegiate athletics beyond the field.



Kyla Dunn
University of Missouri
Director of Events, Engagement and Outreach

Kyla Dunn serves as the Director of Events, Engagement, and Outreach for the College of Arts and Sciences where she leads strategic initiatives to foster connections between the College and its broader community. Specializing in event planning and outreach efforts, she works to elevate the College's visibility and impact. Kyla's expertise in engagement helps strengthen relationships with students, faculty, alumni, and donors, ensuring memorable and meaningful interactions.

**Tyger Glauser Nicholas****University of Tennessee, Knoxville**

Manager of Special Events and University Protocol

Tyger Glauser Nicholas (yes, Tyger is her real name) has served as the Manager of Special Events and University Protocol at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville since 2018. As a member of the University Events and Experiences team, she plans high-profile institutional events and official occasions supporting the chancellor and senior university leadership. Prior to her current role, Tyger spent 10 years working in Student Engagement at UTK and Coastal Carolina University.

**Melissa Goitia****Arizona State University**

Executive Director of University Ceremonies

Melissa Goitia CSEP, is Executive Director of the Office of University Events & Protocol and the Office of University Ceremonies. She is a Protocol Officer at Arizona State University and the co-founder of the North American Association of Commencement Officers (NAACO) a professional association for commencement and graduation planners from across the United States and Canada. Melissa has more than 30 years' experience in event production and has produced commencement and other ceremonies for ASU for more than 20 years. Melissa is a Certified Special Events Professional (CSEP) and holds a Bachelor's degree in Journalism and Public Relations from the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Arizona State University and a Masters degree in Educational Leadership from Northern Arizona University. She completed training as a Protocol Officer and is a certified Intercultural and Etiquette and Protocol Trainer through the Protocol School of Washington® and has completed a certificate in Hospitality & Tourism Management Certificate through Florida Atlantic University.

**Rowan Halliday****The University of Texas at Austin**

Events Program Coordinator, Hildebrand Department of Petroleum and Geosystems Engineering

With over 15 years of safety team leadership and event management, Rowan Halliday has seen some things, from tornado and wildfire threats to flooded event sites to rogue longhorns (and Longhorns). These days she's an Events Program Coordinator at the University of Texas at Austin, and in her spare time she trains event and venue safety teams.



Jim Hooker

AEP Chair, TSEC Academic Solutions

Executive Director, Academic Programs

Jim Hooker is an award-winning event strategist with over 27 years producing world-class academic, corporate and entertainment events. He currently serves as the Executive Director for Academic Programs for TSEC Academic Solutions and is Chair of the Academic Event Professional (AEP). His expertise focuses on accentuating the value of high-touch, emotional relationship building between an organization and its constituencies through events. He has produced landmark celebrations for University of California (both Irvine and Davis), Partners In Health, University of the Pacific, Caltech, Boston University, Williams College, Arizona State University, Bloomsburg University and many others. Prior to joining TSEC, he was Executive Director of University Events at The University of Texas at Austin as well as having served as the Associate Sr. VP for Cultural Relations and University Events at the University of Southern California for 10 years. He holds a master's degree from the USC Annenberg School for Communication where his research focused on The Influence of High Touch Event Communication on Donor Support.



Avni Kansara

University of California, Berkeley

Director of Student Experiences

Avni Kansara is an accomplished events professional and MBA with 20 years of progressive experience, currently serving as the Director of Student Experience for the Evening & Weekend MBA Program at the Haas School of Business, UC Berkeley. She specializes in designing and executing large-scale, multi-day signature events that seamlessly integrate academic goals and networking objectives.



Jihan Lang

Spelman College

Director, Institutional Advancement and Campaign Events

Jihan Lang is a seasoned event strategist specializing in donor and campaign events with over a decade of experience in event planning and institutional advancement. As Director of Institutional Advancement and Campaign Events at Spelman College, she oversees the logistics and execution of 90+ high-profile events annually, ranging from intimate gatherings to large-scale functions of 50,000 attendees. Jihan excels in crafting innovative strategies for donor cultivation, stewardship, and fundraising, including campaign initiatives reaching \$150M. Known for her meticulous attention to detail, collaborative leadership, and creative vision, she transforms events into memorable experiences that drive meaningful connections and institutional success.



Karie O'Neill

University of Delaware

Associate Director, University Events

Karie O'Neill turns big ideas into pivotal touchpoints. With almost 20 years of experience in event planning and strategic communications, she brings creativity, precision, and heart to every project she leads. Karie joined the University of Delaware in 2016 and serves as the Associate Director of Strategic Special Events, producing high-profile celebrations for university leadership, trustees, a former Vice President of the United States and other distinguished guests. She holds a Master's in Strategic Communications and a Strategic Leadership Certificate from UD. Passionate about storytelling through events, Karie believes every gathering should inspire, connect, and create lasting impact.



Matthew Redd

Vanderbilt University

Director of Commencement and Special Events

Matthew is the VP of Strategic Accounts & Innovation at StageClip. Previously, he served as Director of Commencement and Special Events at Vanderbilt University, where he transformed the office into an industry leader and expanded oversight of major events including Commencement, Orientation, conferences, and VIP programs. His career also includes producing 80+ events annually at Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center and two years in Europe planning programs for youth. An active leader, he has served on multiple boards, including two terms as President of ILEA Nashville. Outside of work, Matthew performed with Music City Improv.



Matthew Regan

Emerson College

Director, Advancement Events

Matthew Regan, MMH is the Director of Advancement Events at Emerson College in Boston, where he manages events supporting alumni, fundraising, and donor engagement. Bringing a strong hospitality background, Matthew holds a B.S. from Roger Williams University and a Master of Management in Hospitality from Boston University. He is highly active in the industry, serving as the President of the Boston chapter of the International Live Events Association (ILEA) and on the Advisory Council for the Academic Event Professional Conference. Matthew's passion for events, discovered at Roger Williams, centers on bringing people together for a shared purpose. Specializing in higher education events, he is committed to implementing best practices to create meaningful, polished, and seamless experiences that strengthen brand identity and foster community. He takes pride in the joy his work brings to attendees, building lasting connections and memories.



Liz Ronecker

University of Missouri, College of Arts and Science

Sr. Event Coordinator

Liz Ronecker is a Sr. Event Coordinator for the College of Arts and Sciences that manages logistics for a wide range of academic and community-focused events. With a keen eye for detail and a passion for creating impactful experiences, Liz works closely with faculty and staff to ensure seamless execution of events that enhance the college's mission and engagement.



Adam Rosen

University of Southern California

Associate Vice President, Office of Cultural Relations and University Events

Adam is responsible for the direction, production, and management of more than 300 USC events a year on campus, across Southern California and around the world. He is charged with bringing a strategic and distinct USC branding to events, programs and productions that connect USC's academic community to the outside world. Also under his purview is the University's Arts and Humanities Initiative, USC Visions & Voices. Visions & Voices presents over 100 faculty and school-driven events each year, including performances, screenings, and lectures. In addition, Adam works to expand USC's visibility within Los Angeles' vibrant cultural community and enrich the university's relationship with Southern California's vast array of arts organizations. Adam is an award-winning event and marketing producer whose creative branding solutions have been seen on television, in major print and online publications and by live audiences. Prior to coming to USC in 2012, he produced events while working at Warner Bros., Mattel, Enlighten Creative Marketing Group and Grand Central Marketing. He has broad experience in event planning and production, ranging from small, high-end gatherings to large-scale productions. His affinity for events is rooted in a deep love for the arts, which began in high school theater productions. Away from the office, Adam is an avid softball player and organic gardener.



Rebecca Rumbaugh
University of Nevada, Reno, School of Medicine
Manager, Events and Protocol

Rebecca Rumbaugh brings over 18 years of experience at the University of Nevada, Reno School of Medicine, where she currently supports ceremonial events and strategic initiatives. With a passion for project management and process improvement, she previously served as a project coordinator for Marketing and Communications, streamlining workflows and supervising support staff. She also completed the University of Nevada, Reno's Extended Studies Project Management Certificate Course. Rebecca is known for her institutional knowledge, collaborative nature, and detailed approach to complex ceremonial events such as Commencement, Match Day, and White Coat Ceremonies.



Collette Shaver
University of Nevada, Reno, School of Medicine
Lead, Events and Protocol

Collette Shaver is the Lead for Events and Protocol at the University of Nevada, Reno School of Medicine. With a passion for creating meaningful, mission-driven experiences, she oversees signature events, executive protocols, and strategic planning initiatives that elevate the UNR Med brand. Known for her collaborative spirit and detail-oriented execution, Collette blends creativity with process to ensure each event fosters connection and pride. She brings over eight years of experience in event management and has completed the University's Extended Studies Project Management Certificate Course, which covers tools and techniques for planning, managing scope and stakeholders, risk mitigation, and strategic leadership.



Briana Silvio
Elevated Impressions
Owner

Briana Silvio is a dynamic entrepreneur, educator, and community leader from Cape Cod, Massachusetts. As the founder of Elevated Impressions, she transformed a basement startup into an award-winning balloon décor and event rental company serving five New England states. With a background rooted in hard work and hospitality, Briana is celebrated for her creativity, leadership, and commitment to meaningful partnerships with a focus on honesty, integrity, and humility. Her passion for collaboration and efficiency has earned her numerous industry awards, national speaking invitations, and deep respect from peers across the events community. Briana believes success is best shared, and that strong partnerships elevate every event!



Jill Townsend

University of California, San Diego

Executive Director Special Events and Protocol

Jill Townsend has over 30 years of experience in the Events and Hospitality industry. As Executive Director of Special Events and Protocol at University of California San Diego, Jill is pleased to plan and produce events that make her alma mater shine. She and her team specialize in campus ceremonies, including groundbreakings, dedications, and commencements, in addition to specialty all-campus events that raise enrollment, awareness, visibility, and support. Jill is co-leading the launch of a unified reservation and event system at UC San Diego, streamlining event planning, reporting, and policy compliance. Career highlights include growing and managing a highly respected special events team and producing a three-day commencement weekend featuring His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama.



Doneshia Webster

UNC Chapel Hill, Gillings School of Global Public Health

Student Affairs Event Manager

Doneshia Webster is the Student Affairs Event Manager at UNC Chapel Hill's Gillings School of Global Public Health, where she creates programs that foster connection and belonging. She earned her bachelor's degree in journalism, with a minor in Spanish, from North Carolina A&T State University and a master's in Global Hospitality Management from Georgia State University. Blending creativity with strategy, Doneshia brings a fresh perspective to student engagement. As one of the youngest professionals on her team, she's passionate about bridging generational gaps and designing experiences that resonate with today's students.