

# 2025



## STAFF DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE

APRIL 22-24  
UGA CENTER FOR  
CONTINUING  
EDUCATION & HOTEL  
ATHENS, GA

HOSTED BY:  
THE ATHENS AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



# ELEVATE, ENGAGE, AND EMPOWER

### Tuesday, April 22, 2025 – UGA Continuing Education Center & Hotel – Athens, GA

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|---------------|---|---|
| 2:00pm        | <b>CONFERENCE REGISTRATION OPENS</b><br>Please note that hotel rooms may not be available for check-in until 4:00pm.  | Masters Hall Atrium                     |
| 2:00 – 3:00pm | <b>Welcome to the Chamber Industry Session</b><br>This is a session for any new chamber staff members.  | Masters Hall                            |
| 3:00 – 4:30pm | <b>OPENING KEYNOTE SESSION</b><br><b><i>Influence and Energy: Driving Success</i></b><br>Chambers have always embraced their role as Community Conveners but that isn't enough in today's climate. Chambers need to embrace their role as Community Influencers in a way that creates a positive, productive and collaborative working environment in our communities. Positive energy is infectious and leaders who radiate positive energy influence actions and drive success. But few of us take the time to identify and utilize our energy as a key component of our leadership and influence style. In this session, you'll learn why your influence is critical to your chamber's success and how to tap into your personal energy to create influence that gets things done.<br><i>Casey Steinbacher, Finding Next LLC</i> | Masters Hall                            |
| 5:00 – 7:00pm | <b>WELCOME RECEPTION &amp; DINNER</b><br>Fun evening connecting with your peers! We will start with a reception with our sponsors in the Pecan Tree Galleria, then move down the hall to the Magnolia Ballroom for dinner. From there, we've got a special tour of Sanford Stadium.<br><i>Hosted by the Athens Area Chamber of Commerce</i>   | Pecan Tree Galleria & Magnolia Ballroom |

### Wednesday, April 23, 2025 – UGA Continuing Education Center & Hotel – Athens, GA

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|----------------|---|-------------------|
| 8:00 – 9:00am  | <b>BREAKFAST BUFFET</b><br>No formal presentation during breakfast so you can network together.   | Magnolia Ballroom |
| 9:00 – 9:15am  | <b>OFFICIAL CONFERENCE WELCOME</b><br><i>Sara Ray, President &amp; CEO, Douglas County Chamber &amp; 2025 SDC Chair</i><br><i>David Bradley, President &amp; CEO, Athens Area Chamber</i>   | Masters Hall      |
| 9:15 – 10:30am | <b>GENERAL SESSION</b><br><b><i>Repeat or Evolve: Harnessing Your Focus to Ignite Creativity and Innovation</i></b><br>Every day offers us a choice: to stay in the comfort of repetition or to embrace the growth of evolution. In this inspiring and actionable talk, Jes will guide you through the art of noticing, harnessing, and focusing your personal energy to fuel creativity, drive innovation, and stay inspired in a rapidly changing environment. Drawing on insights from leaders like the Former GM of the Dallas Mavericks, the former CEO of the world's largest medical device company, and trailblazing venture capitalists, Jes shares practical strategies and guiding principles to help you channel your energy into meaningful progress. Learn how to turn ordinary days into extraordinary opportunities that are productive, empowering, and deeply fulfilling.<br><i>Jes Averhart, Open Roads Strategy</i> | Masters Hall      |

10:30am

**BREAK**

**Sponsor Area – Pecan Tree Galleria**

10:45 – 11:45am

**BREAKOUT SESSIONS**

**Topic 1 – Advocacy Part 1**

**Masters Hall**

**Amplify Your Voice: Low-Effort, High-Impact Advocacy for Your Chamber**

Want to boost (or even start) your Chamber's advocacy efforts without breaking a sweat? This session reveals how to maximize your impact with minimal effort! Learn to leverage partnerships, utilize free resources (from the U.S. Chamber, GA Chamber, and Lumin Strategies), craft compelling messages, mobilize your members, and measure your success. Leave with actionable strategies and a toolkit to elevate your advocacy game!

*Brian Francis, Lumin Strategies*

*Clark Jackson, U.S. Chamber*

*Morgan Law, Georgia Chamber*

**Advocacy Session Sponsor: Lumin Strategies**

**Topic 2 – Ambassador Programs**

**Meeting Room Q**

**Supercharge Your Ambassadors Program: Igniting Engagement and Impact**

Want to transform your Chamber Ambassadors into a powerhouse of engagement and impact? This session is your one-stop shop to energize your ambassador program! Learn from ambassador "gurus" and real-world examples to recruit rockstars, ignite engagement, maximize impact, and measure success. Walk away with actionable steps and resources to build a dynamic ambassador program that will take your chamber to the next level!

*Andrianna Butler, Gwinnett Chamber*

*Ali Rauch, Opelika (AL) Chamber*

*Heath Taylor, Dublin-Laurens County Chamber*

**Topic 3 – Non-Dues Revenue Best Practices**

**Meeting Room R**

**Exploring Innovative Revenue Streams for Chamber Success**

In this session, attendees will discover innovative strategies to maximize non-dues revenue. You'll hear about successful revenue initiatives and engage in interactive discussions to share best practices. Join us to gain actionable insights and creative approaches that ensure financial growth and sustainability for your organization.

*Jason E. Ebey and Anissa Starnes, YGM*

Noon – 1:30pm

**SCHOLARSHIP LUNCHEON**

**Magnolia Ballroom**

We will be presenting our 2025-26 GACCE Scholarships & our Staff Service Awards.

1:30 – 2:30pm

**BREAKOUT SESSIONS**

**Topic 1 – Advocacy Part 2**

**Masters Hall**

**Chambers Taking on Legislative Issues**

Hear how local chambers took action on a critical business issue before the Georgia General Assembly, using strategic advocacy to drive real impact. Learn the varying approaches they used, how they mobilized their members and engaged elected officials to make a compelling difference.

*Facilitator – Morgan Law, Georgia Chamber*

*Christie Moore, Valdosta-Lowndes County Chamber*

*Beth Truelove, White County Chamber*

**Advocacy Session Sponsor: Lumin Strategies**

**Topic 2 – Operations Best Practices**

**Meeting Room Q**

**Building Organizational Excellence: Insights from Award Winning Chambers**

What does it take to create a high-performing, award-winning chamber? Join this dynamic session featuring two ACCE Chamber of the Year winners as they share proven strategies for building a strong team culture, optimizing financial management, and implementing operational best practices. Learn how to empower your staff, engage your members, and energize your organization for long-term success. Walk away with actionable insights to elevate your chamber's impact and performance.

*Nick Masino, Gwinnett Chamber*

*Ali Rauch, Opelika (AL) Chamber*

**Topic 3 – Membership Best Practices**

Meeting Room R

**Mastering Membership: Unlocking the Secrets to Successful Sales**

Join us as our expert panelists – *all winners of ACCE sales awards!* – will unveil their "secret sauce" for making lasting impressions on potential chamber members. They will share proven strategies and innovative approaches to effectively communicate and sell the chamber's mission. Learn how to engage prospects, foster meaningful connections, and inspire loyalty through impactful storytelling and personalized outreach. This session promises to equip you with actionable insights that will enhance your membership recruitment efforts and elevate your chamber's success.

*James Allen, Augusta Metro Chamber*

*Megan Lesko, Gwinnett Chamber*

*Tyeme Woods, Gwinnett Chamber*

2:30pm

**EXTENDED BREAK**

Sponsor Area – Pecan Tree Galleria

3:00 – 4:00pm

**60 IDEAS IN 60 MINUTES BREAKOUT SESSIONS**

Come prepared to share your favorite best practices!

**Topic 1 – Events**

Masters Hall

*Facilitator – Heath Taylor, Dublin-Laurens County Chamber*

**Topic 2 – Communications / Marketing**

Meeting Room Q

*Facilitator – Sara Ray, Douglas County Chamber*

**Topic 3 – Membership / Operations**

Meeting Room R

*Facilitator – Anissa Starnes, YGM*

5:00pm

**RECEPTION**

Pecan Tree Galleria &amp; Courtyard

We will start the evening with a reception in the courtyard with our sponsors for a cocktail, then you'll be free to enjoy dinner in Athens!

**Bar Sponsor: ChamberMate**

5:45pm

**REGIONAL NETWORKING DINNERS**

Local Athens Restaurants

We want our members to get to know each other better by their regions, so we've asked our Regional GACCE Board Members to host dinners for their regions. These dinners will be Dutch treat.

**Thursday, April 24, 2025 – UGA Continuing Education Center & Hotel – Athens, GA**

8:00 – 9:00am

**BREAKFAST BUFFET**

Magnolia Ballroom

**"Ask Us Anything" Panel Session**

Are you curious about the inner workings of other GACCE member chambers? Do you have burning questions about how these organizations are surviving and thriving? Join us for an interactive session where the floor is yours to engage directly with our panel of chamber pros. This session is designed to be a dynamic Q&A, allowing attendees to guide the conversation. Whether it's about strategic planning, economic impact, or membership growth, no topic is off-limits.

*Pam Carnes, Cherokee County Chamber*

*Tommy Jennings, Barrow County Chamber*

*Sara Ray, Douglas County Chamber*

*Heath Taylor, Dublin-Laurens County Chamber*

9:00 – 10:30am

**CLOSING KEYNOTE SESSION**

Dogwood Hall

**Wrap Up Whys**

Whether you're a veteran or a newbie in the Chamber world, there's never enough time at Chamber conferences to tie all the presentations and conversations together to really focus on how they all matter to your success. We tend to compartmentalize, select the one that resonated the most (or you actually paid attention to) and spend time in the car ride home wondering how to activate once back at the office. In this session, we'll take a little bit of time to recap what we've heard, discuss how it all can fit together, why it matters and who we need to engage back home to ensure it's productive. And since every instance of success requires a celebration dance, we'll discover who amongst us has the BEST...and steal it of course, 'cause that's what we do in this industry!

*Casey Steinbacher, Finding Next LLC*