

# COAA Connect Fall 2025

## Full Agenda

**Monday, November 10**

**9:00 - 10:00am**

### **COAA 101 | Cheat Codes for the Construction Owners Association of America**

Whether this is your first COAA event or not, you might have questions about the organization and its purpose. Maybe you know the basics but would like a deeper dive or wonder how you can plug in and participate ... or would just like to know how COAA can help you do your job better. If any of those apply, this session is for you. Grab some caffeine and join us for an informal introduction to THE home for Owners who are serious about improving their project leadership game.

Presenters/Facilitators:

Howie Ferguson, COAA Executive Director

Jessica Bonin, COAA Manager of Membership & Sponsorship

**10:30 - 11:30am – Concurrent Sessions:**

### **No Template? No Problem!**

The Texas A&M University System is creating a new campus in downtown Fort Worth unlike any other. Just steps from the Sheraton, the first building of this new campus will be both multidisciplinary and multi-institutional, featuring wildly diverse programs (law, nursing, engineering, and others) from multiple Texas A&M institutions in a vertical stack. See and hear directly from team leaders about the “why” behind this unique approach.

Presenters:

Michael Campbell, Texas A&M University System

Harry Brittan, Texas A&M Fort Worth

Cynthia, Labelle, Stantec Architecture

Larry Tedesco, Turner Construction Co.

### **Best Value >> QBS: One Owner’s New Approach to Selecting Builders**

The Georgia State Financing & Investment Commission (GSFIC) is currently managing more than \$B worth of construction projects. Until a few years ago, CM/GC builders were selected for projects like A/E design teams – through a qualifications-based selection process. GSFIC switched to a “best value” approach in 2021, where qualifications and soft costs (fees, general conditions, etc.) are factors in the selection process. Learn why this change was made, how the process works, what adjustments were made, and other lessons learned.

Presenters/Facilitators:

Charlie Parrish, GA State Financing & Investment Commission

Demauro Starks, GA State Financing & Investment Commission

**11:20am – 12:00pm Lunch**



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### 1:15 - 2:00pm

#### Conference Welcome/Kickoff

Join COAA leaders as they welcome you to Fort Worth, provide an overview of the conference, and speak briefly on organizational news & issues.

Presenters/Facilitators:

John Zahor, COAA President

John Bechtel, COAA Conference Committee Chair

Howie Ferguson, COAA Executive Director

Kristi Ronyak, Construction Angels

Mattie Parker, Mayor of Ft. Worth

### 2:00 - 3:00pm

#### COAA Cares

Join us while we give back to the Fort Worth community by Connecting Attendees with Rewarding Experience & Service

### 3:30 - 5:00pm – Concurrent Workshops:

#### The Future of Construction: An Interactive Experience

This interactive workshop will explore key and emerging trends impacting the industry, including labor shortages, supply chain challenges, and digital transformation. Discover how automation, AI, and data-driven decision-making will shape the future of productivity, the workforce, design, and decision-making. Participate in a discussion to better understand current momentum, challenges, and potential risks. You'll discuss and learn from both peers and technology experts and walk away with a better sense of how to navigate what's over the horizon.

Presenters/Facilitators:

Sasha Reed, Procore Technologies

#### Model-Centric Delivery | Collaboration to the Nth Degree

What if our projects weren't held back by extensive documentation, redundant tasks, and reactive processes? What if design, construction, and operations all spoke the same language through a shared, living model brought to life by the early involvement of key trades?

This session invites Owners and their partners to explore these possibilities together. Based on the "Shifting Paradigms" white paper from the AEC Integration Summit (AECIS), we'll discuss what it means to shift from document-centric delivery to a model-based, collaborative approach ... and what it might take to get there. Rather than present definitive answers, we'll share provocative questions, early experiments, and field-tested challenges that open the door to better alignment, fewer RFIs, and smarter procurement. Expect candid dialogue, small group exercises, practical takeaways, and cross-disciplinary insights, guided by facilitators who have wrestled with these questions in real-world capital projects.



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Presenters/Facilitators:

Travis Hawver, University of Texas

Nathan Wood, SpectrumAEC

Nick Caravella, Avicado

### **Genius In Action | Building High-Performing Teams**

Great teams don't just happen. They're built by understanding individual strengths, identifying gaps, and bridging differences effectively. In this hands-on workshop, participants will go beyond self-discovery and traditional team-building exercises by learning how to cultivate high-performing teams using the GeniusSpark framework. Through guided exercises and real-world applications, attendees will develop a clear strategy for improving team dynamics, enhancing problem-solving, and fostering an environment where every individual thrives.

Presenters/Facilitators:

Rex Miller

### **5:30 – 7:00pm Opening Night Reception**

## **Tuesday, November 11**

### **8:30 – 9:30 AM – Keynote**

#### **Building Strong Teams for Successful Projects**

Projects don't go wrong ... they start wrong. Drawing on insights from a lifetime of helping AEC industry teams grow & improve, Rex reveals the fundamental reasons why large capital projects fail and how leaders can shift their approach to prevent costly mistakes. Using powerful, real-world examples and lessons from professional sports, he'll explore how strong teams, rigorous preparation, and front-end project clarity create a foundation for success. Attendees will leave with actionable insights on overcoming cognitive biases, improving team selection, and making better decisions before projects break ground.

Presenters/Facilitators:

Rex Miller

### **9:45 – 10:45 AM – Concurrent Sessions:**

#### **Building Strong Teams: Let's Discuss**

Join Rex Miller for an even deeper and more interactive exploration of the topics covered in his keynote address.

Presenters/Facilitators:

Rex Miller



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### **DBB The COAA Way: Low Bid, High Functioning**

Auburn University's STEM & Ag Sciences Complex, the largest academic project in the University's history (256,000 GSF / \$225M project cost), is in year two of construction. The facility will house six departments from two colleges, enabling aging facilities to be emptied and demolished. Auburn is constrained with respect to project delivery methods, so they emphasized Lean and tenets of "The COAA Way" throughout procurement to help overcome the limitations of Design-Bid-Build delivery. Learn exactly how they fostered an environment that led to a high-functioning team, which is now on track to complete this large project on time in 2026.

Presenters/Facilitators:

Mary Melissa Taddeo, Auburn U.

David Johnson, Auburn U.

Josh Nooney, JE Dunn

Tyler Deal, JE Dunn

### **11:00am – 12:00pm Concurrent Sessions:**

#### **Collaboration in the Shade of Green | Wake Tech's Vision is Coming To Life**

Wake Tech Community College in North Carolina is helping address skilled workforce shortages in several industries with multiple campuses and facilities that are not only functional & attractive, but highly sustainable and an integral part of the educational experience. Wake Tech's vision for its new East campus was to create an environment where sustainable and energy-efficient strategies are showcased in facilities designed to achieve Green Globes certification.

The Owner and a primary design partner will touch on some of "green" features of those facilities (photovoltaics, fan wall AHUs, LED lighting, geothermal, etc.) but focus primarily on two aspects of the ambitious development:

- How everything from the big picture (mission/vision, goals) to daily minutia (coordinating laydown & deliveries) was coordinated with and communicated to all parties
- Why Green Globes was chosen for sustainability certification instead of LEED or other platforms

Presenters/Facilitators:

Kathy Monteiro, Wake Tech

Jose Torres, McKim & Creed

Dane Wallin, McKim & Creed

#### **Data-Centric Leadership**

New research from Dodge Construction Network and the National Institute of Building Sciences (NIBS) reveals that Owners who invest in making their organizations more data-centric are more likely to be successful. The study, which is based on responses from nearly 200 U.S Owners, specifically identified improved project schedule & budget performance, enhanced collaboration, and more effective use of project data for planning, operations, and asset management.



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While data is the topic, the real story has to do with changing organizational behavior. Discover the larger context from NIBS; learn what the major take-aways are from Dodge; and get the “real world” perspective from an Owner, who will explain how his organization prioritized data-centric practices and share valuable lessons learned.

Presenters/Facilitators:

Steve Jones, Dodge Construction Network

Paul Ruffo, National Institute of Building Sciences

Bill Wade, Southern Methodist University

### 12:00 – 1:30 Project Leadership Awards Lunch

### 1:30 - 2:30pm– Concurrent Sessions

#### **A Process-Driven Partnership**

This session explores the journey of delivering two transformative student housing projects at the University of Houston (one completed; one in-progress) through the lens of process. Replicable strategies – regardless of what’s being built – and the “how” of successful project delivery will be shared by project leaders, including:

- how clarity was prioritized over control
- how trust was built through transparency and accountability
- how the team moved decisively from vision to execution without losing sight of the goals

Presenters/Facilitators:

Don Yackley, University of Houston

Ethan Cook, Austin Commercial Construction

Jonas Risen, Page

#### **Commissioning: What, Why, and How**

When done correctly and collaboratively, commissioning (Cx) adds tremendous value and helps the entire project team deliver a more reliable and more sustainable project. The ideal Cx process begins early in – or even prior to – design and includes peer reviews of the building systems being commissioned, always with an eye toward the closeout/turnover process and long-term operations & maintenance. This session, which features a Cx-experienced healthcare Owner and a trusted Cx service provider, will delve into *what* Cx truly is; *why* it can be such a valuable component of project success; and best practices for *how* to do it well.

Presenters/Facilitators:

Michael Hatton, Memorial Hermann Health System

Ryan Johnson, WSP

Lee Bennett, WSP



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### 2:45 - 3:45pm – Concurrent Sessions:

#### **Budget Smarter, Stay Employed Longer**

Baylor Scott & White Health (BSW), the largest not-for-profit healthcare system in Texas and one of the largest in the U.S., operates 52 hospitals and more than 1,300 care sites. With an annual construction/renovation spend of \$500M or more per year, accurate estimating and budgeting is crucial. Hear from three BSW leaders about the tools, processes, and strategies they've employed to improve accuracy and leader confidence. Examples include:

- Benchmarking
- Polling service providers
- Cash flow projections
- Detailed analysis of market impacts (e.g., tariffs)

Presenters/Facilitators:

Bryce Burkett, Baylor Scott & White

Scott Liles, Baylor Scott & White

Andrew Craigo, Baylor Scott & White

#### **IPD Light Done Right**

Geisinger is a 110-year-old healthcare provider with nearly 300 brick & mortar facilities throughout Pennsylvania, so they are hardly new to the world of project planning & execution. While they have always employed a collaborative approach, Geisinger decided to up their collaboration game even more by leveraging Integrated Project Delivery principles to deliver a 450,000 SF acute care expansion of their main campus in Danville (PA). So far, so GREAT in terms of schedule & budget, quality, safety, team culture, and other measures of success. Hear from the entire core team the “why” and “how” behind their implementation of partnering, Lean tools & strategies, project team health checks, design assist, and a number of other “IPD Light” approaches to project delivery ... many of which are scalable and applicable to much smaller projects.

Presenters/Facilitators:

Ronald Leshner, Geisinger

Andrew Mastin, Pure Project Management

Jason Fierko, EwingCole

Gino Ciotola, Whiting-Turner Contracting Co.

### 4:00 - 5:00 pm - Plenary Session:

#### **Hatfields & McCoys | Getting PD&C and O&M to Work Together**

In many organizations – public and private – a level of internal tension often exists between those in development/construction and those in operations/maintenance. The long-term success of facilities depends, though, on these entities working closely with a unified purpose. In this session, a panel of Owners will discuss tangible ideas for improving the facility turnover process and maintaining a productive relationship between the planning/design/construction and operations & maintenance sides of the house.



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Presenters/Facilitators:

Meg Hohnholt, University of Colorado

Phil Williams, Google

Ken Stonecipher, Global Gaming Solutions

**7:00 - 10:00 pm – Tuesday Evening Event at Pete’s Piano Bar**

**Wednesday, November 12**

**8:30 – 9:30am – Concurrent Sessions:**

### **Powerful Conversations: A Journey to Connection**

We have seemingly lost the ability to connect and converse in thoughtful and meaningful dialogue beyond transactional issues and surface level small talk. How can we reverse that trend and strengthen human connection in our projects? This session will reveal that self-awareness – understanding our beliefs and values – is the first step. Experience the process of looking internally and sharing with others throughout the session allowing for meaningful conversations, deeper relationships, and a greater sense of fulfillment ... all of which leads to better project outcomes.

Presenters/Facilitators:

Kyle Majchrowski, Banner Health and Ripple Intent

### **HOW We Work Together Matters: The TCH North Austin Story**

Texas Children's Hospital's North Austin Campus was a remarkable success, with multiple awards to prove it ... including a 2024 COAA Project Leadership Gold Award. But *why* and *how* was it so successful, and how exactly did this Owner and its team define success?

This presentation will answer those questions, provide big picture context, and share specific examples of the “how,” including:

- Early commitment to Lean, with continuous training and onboarding
- The value of starting slow
- CliftonStrengths assessments, project charter, and conditions of satisfaction
- Having fun and finishing as friends, eager to work together again

Presenters/Facilitators:

Gaurav “GK” Khadse, Texas Children’s Hospital

Kurt Neubek, Page

Sankar Shanmugam, McCarthy Building Companies



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### 9:45 – 10:45am – Concurrent Sessions:

#### **Code Enforcement ... The COAA Way?**

Code enforcement, whether design reviews or onsite inspection, can be contentious, confusing, and confounding. Must it be this way or can “The COAA Way” be applied so the experience is more collaborative?

Hear from three Owners with thoughts on this matter and be ready to share your own!

Presenters/Facilitators:

Rustin Roussel, Austin-Bergstrom International Airport

Mike Mollina, Southern Methodist University

Ed Striffler, City of Peoria (AZ)

*Paul O’Keef, Virginia Tech (facilitator)*

#### **It’s Not the User Group’s Fault You Stink at Communicating**

Ever had a project where the user group’s wishes/desires clashed with immovable objects like building codes, organizational design standards, sustainability goals, or budget and schedule? Yea, thought so.

This session explores how Owners and their design & construction partners can improve engagement with the end users through thoughtful and effective communication. Participants will learn to anticipate client preferences, support their creativity to reimagine existing spaces, and translate ideas into meaningful solutions. Emphasis will be placed on leveraging team dynamics – including humor and authenticity – to build trust and foster problem-solving. With a dive into project case studies and interactive discussion, attendees will leave with practical strategies to build stronger and more collaborative relationships with the ultimate users & occupants of the new or renovated facility.

Presenters/Facilitators:

Carmen Wright, University of Texas at Dallas

Amy Holzle, Stantec

### 11:00am – 12:00pm – Concurrent Sessions:

#### **From Ambition to Impact: Navigating Sustainability in Large Organizations**

An Owner’s decision to “go green” presents a bevy of challenges, from understanding the costs and aligning stakeholders to implementing effective strategies. This dynamic panel discussion brings together Owners from three very different sectors who are leading sustainability initiatives within their organizations. Panelists will share their firsthand experiences, highlighting challenges, successes, and lessons learned. Through engaging dialogue and real-world examples, this session will equip attendees with actionable takeaways to improve their organization’s sustainability journey.





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### Presenters/Facilitators:

Matt Coon, Southwest Airlines

Michelle Crowder, University of Tennessee

Sam Werschky, Cook Children's Healthcare System

*Taylor Gawthorp-Cruse, IMEG (facilitator)*

### **PM Staff Augmentation | One Owner's Journey**

When Texas State Technical College (TSTC) – with its lean internal staff – received \$310 million to expand campuses across the state, a modified approach to project management was needed. In this session, representatives from TSTC and their project management partner will share how the college structured their teams, procured professional services through IDIQ contracts, implemented a PMIS platform, and adapted plans in real time as enrollment numbers and facility needs evolved. Attendees will leave with practical takeaways, strategies, and considerations for augmenting an Owner's internal staff.

### Presenters/Facilitators:

Jay Wesson, Texas State Technical College

Seth Ackland, Kitchell

Katherine Kraai, Kitchell

### **12:00 – 1:30pm**

#### **Lunch & COAA Connect Roundtable**

Always one of the highest-rated sessions at COAA Connect, this slide deck-free “town hall” gathering allows for peer-to-peer sharing of challenges, best practices, and lessons learned. Enjoy a great lunch, then stay right where you are for a beautifully unstructured discussion of whatever is on your mind.

### **2:00 – 3:30pm**

#### **Project Tour: No Template? No Problem!**

The Texas A&M University System is creating a new campus in downtown Fort Worth unlike any other. Just steps from the Sheraton, the first building of this new campus will be both multidisciplinary and multi-institutional, featuring wildly diverse programs (law, nursing, engineering, and others) from multiple Texas A&M institutions in a vertical stack. Tour the in-progress project and hear directly from team leaders about the “why” behind this unique approach.

