

FULL CONFERENCE AGENDA

COAA CONNECT SPRING 2026 | Denver, CO

Wednesday, April 29

8:30 - 9:30 am – Concurrent Sessions:

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 diver 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:

Howie Ferguson, COAA Executive Director

Jessica Bonin, COAA Manager of Membership & Sponsorship

The Emerging Youth Workforce: Why Shifting Graduate Student Demographics Matter

Over the last twenty years, higher education has experienced a major demographic shift: graduate students have become significantly younger, with students aged 24 and under now making up a much larger share of America's graduate school population. This trend clearly has broad implications for higher ed Owners – new expectations for space, schedules, engagement, and amenities – but also for others. For example, Owners in other sectors and all AEC service providers can expect to see older, more educated, *and more indebted* graduates entering the workforce. Learn why this shift has taken place and digest how it may impact your organization and/or those you work with or hire.

Presenter:

Nico Hohman, Georgetown University

10:00 - 11:30am – Concurrent Sessions:

Information Exchange / Transition to Operations 2.0

It's back, baby! Reprising a popular session from past COAA conferences, two longtime COAA evangelists – now competitors – will facilitate a discussion on improving the transition from construction to operations, a central concern of most Owners.

This session is open to everyone but is geared toward Owners who – or who aspire to – capture asset data during design & construction and turn it over to operations. No “death by PowerPoint” or lectures here ... just a facilitated town hall gathering devoted to improving the information handoff process at the end of construction. Owners planning to attend are encouraged to submit short case study examples of challenges, successes, lessons learned, or best practices.



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Facilitators:

Nicholas Johnson, Kahua

Sergio Aranda, Trimble

Help Us Help You! Top Strategies for Budget Adherence and Cost Management

Capital projects, regardless of size, scope, or complexity, are often inherently risky ventures. Chief among those risks are the financial ones ... from shaky conceptual estimates developed with limited data to scope creep, change orders, and the pressures of deadlines and escalation. Delivering a project on budget has never been more difficult ... or more essential. Hear tangible strategies for success from a highly experienced Owner and their specialty consulting partners on topics including benchmarking, audits, and key contract provisions.

Presenters:

Carolina Cudemus Jones, Yale University

Melissa Morea Evola, Ankura Consulting

John Sween, Ankura Consulting

12:00 – 1:00pm Lunch

1:15 - 2:00pm

Conference Welcome/Kickoff

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

Presenters:

John Zahor, COAA President

John Bechtel, COAA Conference Committee Chair

Howie Ferguson, COAA Executive Director

2:00 - 3:00pm

COAA Cares

Connecting Attendees with Reward Experience & Service!

3:30 - 5:00pm Concurrent Sessions:

The HOW of Project Team Collaboration and The Owner's Role

Collaboration increases the likelihood of project success. Nothing new there and offshoots of the premise have been discussed at COAA events for 20+ years, but is there data that proves it and provides insight into more of the HOW than the WHY? A 2025 report by the University Research Institute (URI) has answers. URI collected feedback from nearly 400 stakeholders involved with federal, state, and local government projects, then applied both behavioral science and analytics to



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the results. The results not only confirmed that collaboration is critical to project success but also identified eight factors or dimensions that most consistently indicate effective team collaboration. One of those is continuous involvement of what COAA refers to as “the good Owner,” who:

- Shows up and stays engaged
- Provides clarity on roles & responsibilities
- Is unafraid to admit when something isn't working
- Set the right tone and leads by example
- Empowers their teams
- Doesn't ignore conflict

Learn more about the compelling results of this study and why those results are applicable to practically any Owner.

Panelists:

Spencer Moore, MD Anderson Cancer Center
David Triplett, Federal Bureau of Investigation
Andy Woommavovah, CommonSpirit Health
Joe Powell, University Research Institute

Artificial Intelligence: Multiple Perspectives

AI. References to it are inescapable but how does or can it tangibly impact how we work? Here's a chance to learn about the power of AI from several perspectives, as multiple presenters share their thoughts in a single session. Buckle in and be ready to share your questions & feedback on this bleeding edge topic.

Presenters:

Jonathan McCann, University of Colorado Health
Matt Sprague and Sergio Aranda, Trimble

Nicholas Johnson, Kahua
Cherie Chenowith, CTC Consulting

John Audi, University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School
Dareen Salama, Gryps

Topic Tables | Select, Discuss, Rotate, Repeat

Get ready to programmatically speed-date. Ten tables, each with a discussion facilitator, will host five topics of great interest to Owners and their partners. You'll spend 15-20 minutes at one table, then rotate to another table with a different topic ... then do it a third time and participate in outbriefs that review common trends, thoughts, and ideas.



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Moderators:

Sam Werschky, Cook Children's Healthcare System and Eric Vandenbroucke, IMEG

Table Facilitators:

- *Drew Furry | Purdue University*
- *Jim Carroll | Auburn University*
- *Meg Hohnholt | University of Colorado*
- *Jim Beck | Allegheny Health*
- *Amy Luchun | Lamar Johnson Collaborative*
- *Tim Stillwell | Garbutt Construction*
- *John Giovannone | Whiting-Turner*
- *Brian Campa | Cooper Carry*
- *Carlos Sanchez | MBP*
- *Jeff Johnson | IDS*

5:30 – 7:00pm Opening Night Reception

Thursday, April 30

7:15 – 8:15am Breakfast

8:30 - 9:30am – Keynote

The Power of The Pivot

Understatement of the century: our world is in flux. Change is hard enough for most people, but disruptive, uncertain, and ever-changing change can ruffle even the most experienced and stable among us. But what if we could convert disruption into innovation? Strengthen our agility and composure in the midst of uncertainty? Darrell will share tangible examples of how organizations, teams, leaders, and doers can better manage change, clarify direction, and achieve peak performance by improving their ability to change direction.

Presenter:

Darrell Hammond, Higher Ground

10:00 - 11:00am – Concurrent Sessions:

From Insight to Action | Applying The Power of The Pivot

Join Darrell Hammond for a more intimate follow-up to his keynote presentation. Explore practical applications and come armed with questions.



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Presenter:

Darrell Hammond, Higher Ground

Managing MEGA-Change

What happens when the value of a change is 50%, 80%, or even 100% of the entire project? How should the Owner and their partners deal with such a seismic shift and maintain both project momentum and a healthy relationship? This session will provide examples of some of the unique considerations for evaluating, approving, and executing large scale changes to an underway project. Using a “macro lens” case study basis of semiconductor megaproject, the presenters will demonstrate the scalability of their best practices to any type or size of project.

Presenters:

Matthew Sandoval, Micron

Jacob Ortego, HPM

11:15am – 12:15pm – Concurrent Sessions:

How Do You Eat an Elephant? A Bite-at-a-Time Approach to Deferred Maintenance

Owners with campuses or multiple facilities face an ongoing challenge of aging infrastructure. Inadequate or “strings attached” funding and procurement constraints make the challenge even more daunting for some Owners. Penn State University has begun taking some bites of their deferred maintenance backlog through their Capital Systems Renewal Program (CSRP) – a strategic approach that leans on projects that address similar deficiencies in multiple facilities, like elevator replacement, masonry renewal, window repairs, etc. Learn all about the CSRP and be ready to share your own ideas and strategies for pachyderm consumption.

Presenters:

Gina Rossi, Penn State University

Robert Lingenfelter, Penn State University

Justin Seltzer, Alexander Building Construction

Furniture Planning Advil ...

... is suggested for anyone who’s felt the headache coming on when furniture shows up late, costs more than expected, or creates downstream issues no one planned for. Furniture may be a small line item on some projects and a major one on others, but its impact on schedule, coordination, and closeout is almost always larger than anticipated.

This session focuses on the real-world pressure points where furniture decisions intersect with capital project delivery and what Owners and project teams can do differently to avoid unnecessary pain. Using examples from healthcare, higher education, and corporate environments, the



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discussion highlights where furniture scope commonly breaks down and which issues are actually worth the effort to solve.

Presenters:

Dianne Murata, Kimiko Designs

12:15 – 1:15pm Lunch and Albert E. Phillips Scholarship Presentation

1:30 - 2:30pm – Concurrent Sessions:

The Answers, My Friends, Are Blowing In the Wind

The National Laboratory of the Rockies (NLR) – previously the National Renewable Energy Laboratory – occupies a 327-acre campus in Golden (CO) and bridges research with real-world applications to advance energy technologies that lower costs, boost the economy, strengthen security, and ensure abundant energy. Attendees will see examples of some of the incredible research being done at the National Wind Technology Center on NLR’s Flatiron campus and learn the story of one particular facility ... successfully delivered despite an array of challenges thanks to “good Owner” leadership and a collaborative, “best interests of the project” approach.

Presenters:

Brian Cox, National Laboratory of the Rockies

James Braam, HDR

Jessica Yechout, M.A. Mortenson Company

Leading with EQ: Building Stronger Teams & Better Projects

Emotional intelligence isn’t a “soft” skill ... it’s a leadership superpower. Backed by Harvard research and presented by a longtime Owner and former COAA President, this interactive session explores how self-awareness, emotional regulation, and effective communication can transform teams and elevate project success. Expect practical tips, real-world examples, and engaging exercises that will help you lead with impact and build stronger, more resilient teams.

Presenter:

Kevin Lewis, Loudoun County (VA) Public Schools

2:45 - 3:45pm – Concurrent Sessions:

Design-Build at the Speed of Light

Launching a new medical school is challenging. Designing and building it in roughly two years is extraordinary. Learn how the University of Northern Colorado’s College of Osteopathic Medicine project – with roughly 110,000 GSF and tracking for LEED v4 Gold and completion this summer – overcame a bevy of challenges by focusing squarely on “best interests of the project” and adopting a



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number of procurement, communication, and delivery strategies through a design-build approach. You may never build a medical school or face such intense schedule pressure, but you'll nonetheless gain practical, Owner-focused insights and ideas that may be of use on your projects.

Presenters:

Nate Reinhard, University of Northern Colorado

Scarlett Schmidt, Adolfson & Peterson Construction

Mike Bucher, SmithGroup

Reimagining Electronic Procurement

Sometimes the most impactful solutions don't come from adopting new tools but from rethinking ones you already have. In this session, the State of Wisconsin and their trusted technology consultant share how they transformed eBuilder's bidding module into dynamic public-facing websites tailored to their needs. Instead of settling for default workflows or waiting for custom development, the team used creativity, process design, and thoughtful configuration to reimagine the bidding experience. The result? A scalable, compliant solution that streamlined public bidding and met complex procurement requirements without starting from scratch.

Presenters:

Jessica Scharff, State of Wisconsin

Ian Hilder, Avicado

4:30 – 8:00pm Reception at Trimble's Headquarters

Transportation provided to and from venue.

Friday, May 1

8:30 - 9:30am – Concurrent Sessions:

What Contractors Really Value: The Results Are In

In 2026, Owners must understand that partners have plenty of work to choose from. This makes it even more imperative for Owners to be the sort of client builders and designers want to work with. The results of a 2025 Colorado Contractors Association survey provide great insight on the qualities contractors value in their clients, including fairness, promptness, transparency, and clear direction. Learn more about the findings of this study and discover actionable strategies for becoming a "client of choice" ... attracting the best teams, getting better prices, and delivering superior projects.

Presenters:

David Skuodas, Mile High Flood District



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Facilities Acceptance & Turnover Done Right

The completion and turnover of construction projects is most people's least favorite thing. Even successful, healthy project teams are ready to move on, but the "finish" is what many – especially end users – remember most. Successful completion, occupancy, and turnover is often complicated by multi-stakeholder coordination and process delays, especially with healthcare and other specialty facilities. Using several Veterans Affairs case studies, this session will address real-world challenges and key factors that impede progress or cause delays. Even better, the presenters will share tangible ideas and strategies for avoiding or overcoming these obstacles.

Presenters:

Todd Bofinger, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Andrea Vera, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Margaret Lucey, Deloitte

10:00 - 11:00am – Concurrent Sessions:

What Makes for a Good Owner? The Superintendents' Perspective

Of course, projects are accomplished by large teams of people, but success is almost rooted in the hands of one ultra-important person – the builder's superintendent. This guy or gal must have an incredibly diverse set of skills – both technical and non – and be able to understand when & how to deploy them. Hear from a "best of the best" threesome of highly successful superintendents on the traits of their favorite Owners/clients. What are the common threads of organizations they most want to work with and what can Owners do to better position themselves to get "A team" proposals and better results?

Panelists:

John Gellings, The Whiting-Turner Contracting Company

Ben Schlick, DPR

Kevin Harrison, Adolfson & Peterson Construction

POEs | A Framework for Continuous Improvement

The Post-Occupancy Evaluation (POE) is systematic process of assessing a building's performance and user satisfaction after it has been built and occupied. This is done by gathering feedback & data to understand how well the facility meets needs and then identifying areas for improvement in future efforts to plan / design / construct / operate. Through the lens of a higher ed case study, attendees will walk away with strategies and best practices for POE development and a deeper understanding of how valuable this tool can be to the "good" Owner.

Presenters:

Chad Stirrett, Western Michigan University

Jeff Bonk, Integrated Design Solutions



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11:30am – 1:00pm – Concurrent Sessions

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.

