

COAA CONNECT FALL 2026

November 2-4

Savannah

Monday, November 2 | 8:30-9:30 AM

Concurrent Sessions:

COAA 201 | The Value Proposition, Membership, and Website Tour

You might know what C-O-A-A stands for but would like to learn more about the organization's Value Proposition, current initiatives, and more. Maybe you're a current or potential member and want to understand the changes coming in 2027. Or maybe you'd like a guided tour of the COAA website. In any case, you're in luck, as staff leaders will cover all of this and more about the industry's most Owner-centric organization.

Presenters:

Howie Ferguson, COAA Executive Director

Jessica Bonin, COAA Manager of Membership & Sponsorship

A Data-Centric Approach to Project Delivery

The University of Georgia's (UGA) transition to an independent School of Medicine required more than delivering a new facility. It demanded a fundamentally different approach to decision-making. Faced with aggressive timelines, evolving program requirements, and highly technical medical education spaces, the project team adopted a data-centric process to guide planning, design, and execution.

Instead of relying on traditional programming assumptions, UGA and its partners leveraged structured data inputs to inform critical decisions at every stage. Attendees will gain insight into how a data-centric mindset enabled the team to balance competing priorities, while supporting early decision-making, reducing risk and uncertainty, maintaining schedule, and meeting rigorous accreditation requirements.

Presenters:

James Maret, University of Georgia

Mike Moreland, Flad Architects

Richard Dozier, Newcomb & Boyd

Andrew Kapusta, Turner Construction



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Savannah Tour For Morons

Get ready to laugh, learn, and experience Savannah like never before! Join us for the wildly entertaining Savannah for Morons Tour, a fast-paced, 90-minute comedy trolley adventure through one of America's most historic and eccentric cities.

Monday, November 2 | 9:45-10:15 AM

COAA Membership: Q&A, How-To, Changes, and More

Wanna go even deeper on COAA membership, pose questions, or get some 1-on-1 training on managing your existing membership? Here's your chance, in a small group setting, to pick the brain of COAA's Manager of Membership & Sponsorship.

Facilitator:

Jessica Bonin, COAA Manager of Membership & Sponsorship

Monday, November 2 | 10:30-11:30 AM

Concurrent Sessions:

Digital Twin: Fairytale or Reality?

Spoiler alert – it's choice B (reality).

This session explores how Owners can transition from static BIM models to dynamic digital twins empowered by real-time information for operations & maintenance. Three highly experienced presenters will first review the differences between BIM and a digital twin before then illustrating the power of a centralized digital data platform to establish a single, reliable source of truth. No myths or legends here ... just tangible examples of digital twin benefits, including:

- asset management continuity regardless of vendor changes
- strategic decision-making in capital planning and lifecycle costing
- significant efficiency gains in day-to-day tasks (e.g., troubleshooting)

You'll walk away understanding WHY (bother doing this), HOW (to go about doing it), and WHAT (data should be captured & leveraged).

Presenters:

Phil Williams, Google

Marie Hunter, Avixi

Jeremiah Almario, CBRE Group



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Design-Build Delivery | The Why & How of One Owner's Choice

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) decided to deliver a large natural park project via Design-Build, which it had only (sort of) used once before. Learn why this choice was made, what lessons were learned, and exactly how TPWD and their partners:

- leveraged this delivery method
- engaged a large and highly engaged stakeholder team
- managed budget and schedule with multiple phases and multiple GMPs
- resolved design and construction conflicts

Presenters:

Christy Seals, Texas Parks & Wildlife Department

Allen McKinney, Texas Parks & Wildlife Department

Michael McCall, Byrne Construction

Carolyn Roman, MarmonMok Architecture

Monday, November 2 | 12:00-1:00 PM

Lunch

Monday, November 2 | 1:15-2:00 PM

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/Facilitators:

John Zahor, COAA President

John Bechtel, COAA Conference Committee Chair

Howie Ferguson, COAA Executive Director

"Savannah Dan" Ledger

Monday, November 2 | 2:00-3:00 PM

COAA Cares

Connecting Attendees with Reward Experience & Service! Activity TBD



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Monday, November 2 | 3:30-5:00 PM

Concurrent Workshops:

Horse Before Cart: A Problem-First Approach to Lifecycle Planning

Owners invest significant resources creating facility information during the life of a project, yet much of this information remains locked in turnover packages, disconnected systems, and institutional memory. At the same time, organizations are rushing to invest in AI and data infrastructure before even understanding the problem they are trying to solve. This workshop will challenge attendees to start with the problem, not the technology. Learn how operational readiness data can be transformed into actionable operational intelligence, and how data-driven tools can support lifecycle operations & maintenance.

Presenters:

Jim Stephens, Georgia Institute of Technology

Sanjyot Bhusari, Affiliated Engineers

Foundations for Project Success: Let's Workshop It

The most successful projects are rooted in decisions and conversations that take place long before the first rendering or model. This session will begin with reflections on a decades-long Owner/architect partnership, featuring practical feedback on what Owners can do prior to the design phase to protect budgets, streamline decisions, and build more effective relationships with their design partners. The format is intentionally unrehearsed ... just two people who've built trust over many projects, willing to say the quiet parts out loud and share what they've experienced, good and not so good, across a variety of building types and delivery methods.

Then, it's your turn. En masse or in small groups, the facilitators will seek to hear what you do to set your projects up for success and how you establish a healthy, trusting relationship with your design and construction partners.

Presenters:

Kathryn Horne, UNC Charlotte

Jessica Figenholtz, Perkins & Will



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Turning Project Team Culture Into a Performance Advantage

What if the biggest risk to your project isn't technical, but relational?

Delivering a \$2B hospital expansion in downtown Houston (TX) required more than great planning & execution. It demanded Owner-led alignment across a complex ecosystem of partners, especially given early challenges that included misalignment, communication breakdowns, and competing priorities. In response, the Owner made the deliberate decision to treat culture as a performance strategy, not an afterthought.

Learn how Harris Health and its design & construction partners leveraged the skills and strategies of a “culture strategist” to shape and track team health. Attendees won't just hear about team transformation ... they will experience it in real time through polling and other interaction to illustrate how individual drivers shape communication, decision-making, and team dynamics.

Presenters:

Patrick Casey, Harris Health

Whitney Fuessel, HKS

Adam Sangl, McCarthy

Tanika Vital-Pringle, Brand Rebirth

Monday, November 2 | 5:30-7:00 PM

Opening Night Reception

Tuesday, November 3 | 7:15-8:15 AM

Breakfast

Tuesday, November 3 | 8:30-9:30 AM

Keynote Session:

Construction Outlook: What's In The Mix After '26?

Construction Owners, builders, trades, and other project delivery stakeholders have endured a tumultuous 2026. Will 2027 offer any relief from high tariffs, war-related price volatility, workforce shortages, or other challenges? Ken Simonson, AGC of America's chief economist for more than 25 years, will provide his insights and fearless forecasts for these issues and more.

Presenter:

Ken Simonson, Associated General Contractors of America



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Tuesday, November 3 | 9:45-10:45 AM

Concurrent Sessions:

Construction Outlook: Let's Discuss

Join Ken Simonson for an interactive follow-up to his keynote address. This more intimate gathering will offer plenty of time for Q&A, so come armed with questions and concerns.

Presenter:

Ken Simonson, Associated General Contractors of America

The Power of Partnering, Strategic Leadership, and Resiliency

Even the simplest of projects usually have obstacles to overcome. Imagine a more complex project – renovation of a historic courthouse on the heels of COVID – and an almost unbelievable array of challenges, from funding gaps and highly engaged users to unforeseen conditions and a significant event during construction. Dealing with all of that and maintaining both the vision and team culture is the story of GSA's Tomochichi Courthouse project in Savannah.

Learn how the team adopted a strategic resiliency mindset to find solutions, including contractual pivots, funding reprogramming, and a commitment to unique 'Non-Admissibility' partnering. In the end, along with a beautiful building, the Owner and its project team transformed a site of extreme duress into a masterclass in collaborative recovery.

Presenters:

Abigail Low, General Services Administration

Gaftie Marlow, General Services Administration

Jennifer Charzewski, Liollo Architecture

Marshall Olson, Brasfield & Gorrie

Tuesday, November 3 | 11:00 AM – Noon

Concurrent Sessions:

Breaking the Sunk Cost Bias: Objectively Choosing Between New Construction and Renovation

Most serial-builder Owners periodically face a high-stakes crossroad: invest in the renovation of a legacy building or scrap it and build new? For the Virginia Institute of



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Marine Science (VIMS), this dilemma centered on a deceptively "young" lab facility – built in 1996 but with a failing infrastructure and façade that jeopardized its reason for existing. VIMS decided to build new but reached that decision objectively with data and a unique scoring system. With the new facility now operational for more than a year, VIMS and its design & construction partners will reflect on the decision-making process, lessons learned, and how success ultimately came down to team trust.

Presenters:

Mark Brabham, Virginia Institute of Marine Science

Rick Berrey, Kjellstrom & Lee

Jay Woodburn, Baskervill

Leading With The COAA Way: Cultivating a Culture of Trust

Viewed through "The COAA Way" prism, claims and disputes are not viewed as inevitable project risks, but as symptoms of a breakdown in culture, leadership, or communication. True project success isn't found in a more complex contract or newer software platform – it's nurtured by the people who lead and execute the project. This session explores how a "Good Owner," supported by a team of collaborative partners, can move beyond adversarial posturing to create an environment of trust and respect. A panel of seasoned pros will share their thoughts on how a "best interests of the project" approach naturally mitigates disputes and helps achieve the ultimate goal of better projects.

Panelists:

Gerald Pilgrim, Georgia State Financing & Investment Commission

Sean Moxley, Garbutt Construction

Zack Rippeon, Adams & Reese

Jon Critelli, StoneTurn (moderator)

Tuesday, November 3 | 12:00-1:00 PM

Lunch | Project Leadership Awards

Tuesday, November 3 | 1:15-2:15 PM

Concurrent Sessions:

Data Centers: A Primer for All Owners

Data center construction is exploding, with 1,500 currently in development across the U.S. according to a Pew Research Center analysis. You may never build a data center, but you,



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your projects, your community, and/or your industry will be impacted by them (or already are). This session will provide insight on why so many data centers or campuses are being built, what they're comprised of, why they're so expensive, and what the impacts are on all of us.

Presenters:

Jieer Ren, Evolve

Kristin Arnoldi, Mead & Hunt

Want To Be a Better Owner? Try Asking Your Partners.

To improve project delivery outcomes, the University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) began in 2025 hosting roundtable discussions with their design and construction service-providers. Within a simple "What Should We Start, Stop, or Keep Doing?" framework in an environment that invited candor, these conversations unearthed opportunities to improve and created a shared understanding of challenges faced by each group. Beyond the valuable feedback, the discussions helped establish a habit of listening and sent a very clear message to the AEC community that this was an Owner who sincerely cared about improving.

Owner and AEC participants from these discussions will review both the lessons learned and how those insights are informing updates to UMB's standard operating procedures and approach to project delivery. This complements a panel discussion at COAA Connect Spring 2026 in Denver, where builder superintendents shared their feedback on the traits & habits of their best Owner clients.

Presenters:

Jack Mumma, University of Maryland, Baltimore

Jody Latimer, University of Maryland, Baltimore

Marvin Kemp, Design Collective

Tom Gnau, J. Vinton Schafer Construction

Tuesday, November 3 | 2:45-3:45 PM

Concurrent Sessions:

Demystifying TVD | Four Perspectives

Many people assume Target Value Delivery (TVD) is reserved for mega projects, IPD, or teams that have used it before. This session debunks that myth and provides tangible,



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take-home evidence that TVD is a strategy applicable to almost any project type. You'll hear from the SME who literally helped write the TVD book for the Lean Construction Institute and the O/A/C team that's delivering a project destined for success thanks to the use of TVD. Walk away with a clear understanding of how to leverage this powerful approach to aligning goals with funding and strengthening trust through transparency.

Presenters:

Tony Rhodes, Michigan State University

Tammy McConaughy, Lean Construction Institute

Colin Martin, Barton Malow

Jeff Bonk, Integrated Design Solutions

Healthy Projects Begin With Healthy Teams

As projects become larger and more complex, Owners require effective methods to understand not only how their projects and project teams are performing, but why. Program/project health assessments provide a structured approach to evaluating leadership, risk management, stakeholder collaboration, organizational effectiveness, and overall performance. Drawing on benchmarking insights and lessons from a transportation Owner's experience, attendees will explore WHY these assessments are so valuable and HOW the Owner is putting the results to immediate use moving forward.

Presenters:

Rick Major, GoTriangle

Kevin Haynes, MBP

Tuesday, November 3 | 4:00-5:00 PM

Plenary Session:

Mental Health in Construction | A Candid Discussion

The construction industry, with 8.3 million workers, has alarming wellness statistics: a suicide rate 5x higher than all other industries combined and substance abuse rates twice as high as the general populace. The industry's culture of toughness, long days, physical demands, and isolation contribute to a 'don't speak up' environment that perpetuates these issues. With more work than ever being accomplished by a reduced workforce under increased pressure, the problem is exacerbated.

Overcoming all of that requires a "The COAA Way" approach to first simply valuing people. True progress then requires collaboration between Owners, GCs, and trade



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partners to have frank discussions, raise jobsite standards, foster inclusivity, and recognize that high performance leans heavily on a person's mental and physical wellbeing.

Hear from the CEOs of three of the nation's largest builders on what they and ALL of us can do to help revamp the industry's culture so the well-being of every worker is treated as a shared responsibility.

Presenters:

Mike Choutka, Hensel Phelps

Les Hiscoe, Shawmut Design and Construction

Tom Reilly, Turner Construction

Corey Clayborne, Construction Industry Round Table (facilitator)

Tuesday, November 3 | 8:00–10:30 PM

Tuesday Evening Event

Wednesday, November 4 | 7:30-8:30 AM

Breakfast

Wednesday, November 4 | 8:30-9:30 AM

Concurrent Sessions:

Fourth-and-Long: Delivering the Vision Against All Odds

It's not whether you get knocked down, it's whether you get up.

– Vince Lombardi

Vince would be proud of the team that revitalized the home of Penn State University's Department of Physics. Despite a drastic budget reduction, a cumbersome delivery method, COVID, leadership changes, and other circumstances, the vision outlined in the project's original charter never changed. Hear directly from the team that navigated this complicated journey together and apply some of their strategies for "getting up" the next time your project is "knocked down."

Presenters:

Jeffrey Spackman, Penn State University

Jessie Storaska, ZGF Architects

Katie Jacob, Barton Malow



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Lessons Learned from Building “Outside the Box”

When an organization builds outside its established footprint, they quickly discover that the usual playbook doesn't apply. Using the recently completed Carnegie Mellon University Robotics Innovation Center as a case study, leaders of that project will share practical lessons from building on a former brownfield site at the edge of a long-established residential neighborhood. They'll talk candidly about what worked, what surprised them, and what they wish they'd known earlier. While the building's program is one of a kind, the challenges and lessons will resonate with any Owner expanding into a new community or delivering a project outside its traditional environment.

Presenters:

Ralph Horgan, Carnegie Mellon University

Jennifer Askey, Perkins Eastman

John Wattick, Mosites

Wednesday, November 4 | 10:00-11:00 AM

Concurrent Sessions:

Kicking Field Goals While the Goalposts Are Moving

How do you successfully deliver a multi-year renovation when the facility never truly shuts down, stakeholders (and expectations) keep changing, and both the budget and schedule are immovable?

You may never be involved with a major college football stadium project, but you can still learn plenty from the University of Tennessee and their partners. Leaders of UT's multi-phase, decade-long Neyland Stadium renovation project will explain and illustrate how work was delivered within narrow off-season windows while they continuously adapted to evolving expectations and multiple leadership changes. Rather than focusing on what was built, the discussion centers on the how of decision-making, communications, project team alignment, and more ... making this remarkable story of use to practically any Owner.

Presenters:

Jim Campbell, University of Tennessee

Eric Ducote, University of Tennessee

Nick Lawrence, The Christman Company

Peter Ludman, Cope Architecture



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Mockups and Simulations: Maximizing the Value of Interactive Design

The end users and stakeholders of most projects are often not familiar or comfortable with 2D drawings or BIM models. Making decisions, aligning expectations, and obtaining buy-in becomes much easier when stakeholders can actually see, touch, and experience the spaces they'll one day inhabit. This presentation will explore the use of simulations, virtual reality, and physical mockups, which allow project leaders and stakeholders to rapidly & accurately evaluate the impact of design decisions. Using several real-world projects, the presenters will illustrate both the benefits and adaptability of these powerful planning and design tools across projects of varying scope, scale, and complexity.

Presenters:

Travis Hawver, University of Texas at Austin

Hilary Bales, Stantec Architecture

Chris Caillier, Stantec Architecture

Wednesday, November 4 | 11:30 AM – 1:00 PM

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.

Wednesday, November 4 | 1:30-2:00 PM

Renewal of the Tomochichi Courthouse | Presentation & Tour

The Tomochichi Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse – a treasured landmark in Savannah – has demonstrated a remarkable degree of resilience, having been modified and adapted to evolving needs several times in the past 120 years. While some of its extraordinary features stood as city landmarks since the original construction, much of its interior glory was hidden away and all but forgotten. This pre-tour overview will explain how the Owner (GSA) and its team established priorities for preservation, peeled back the layers of time, meticulously stabilized and/or restored character-defining features, and designed sensitive interventions to modernize the Courthouse for safety, security, and accessibility while also allowing for future growth.

Then, make the short walk to the Courthouse for an insider’s look at exactly the right time – between construction and occupancy. Project leaders and stakeholders will guide



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participants and share insights on both design & construction particulars and how some of the remarkable project delivery challenges were overcome.

Presenters:

Abigail Low, General Services Administration

Gaftie Marlow, General Services Administration

Jennifer Charzewski, Liollo Architecture

Mary Katherine Lanzillotta, Hartman-Cox Architects

