

COAA CONNECT SPRING 2025 | Pittsburgh

Session 25A-01 | Wednesday, May 7 | 8:00-9:00am

Location: Cambria

COAA 101 | Cheat Codes to 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:

John Zahor, University of Maryland, Baltimore County

Howie Ferguson, COAA Executive Director

Jessica Bonin, COAA Manager of Membership and Sponsorship

Session 25A-Tour | Wednesday, May 7 | 9:30-11:00am

Location: Meeting in Lobby

Optional Pittsburgh Bus Tour

Experience Pittsburgh Like Never Before – A Double-Decker Bus Tour

Get ready to take in the sights, sounds, and stories of Pittsburgh from the best vantage point in the city—atop a classic double-decker bus! This guided tour will take you through the heart of the Steel City, showcasing its rich history, stunning architecture, and vibrant culture. Attendees can expect iconic landmarks, breathtaking views, engaging commentary and the perfect photo opportunities.

Session 25A-02A | Wednesday, May 7 | 9:30-11:00am

Location: Westmoreland

Lean Coffee

This session is not Lean...and it's not about Coffee! Come experience an organized, interactive meeting format where the participants set the agenda, have fun, and learn what is important to them. Attendees will learn why it is called Lean Coffee, then we will experience the process first-hand and also learn how to use this format for our own meetings. People who have used it say things like, "It completely changed our staff meetings—for the better. It's amazing."

Presenters/Facilitators:

RJ Reed



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LUNCH | Wednesday, May 7 | 11:30am-1:00pm

Location: Allegheny Ballroom

Refuel, recharge, and reconnect! Join fellow attendees for a delicious lunch and take advantage of this time to network, share insights, and build new connections. Whether you're continuing a conversation from the morning session or striking up a new one, this is your chance to engage with peers in a relaxed setting.

Session 25A-03 | Wednesday, May 7 | 1:30pm-2:00pm

Location: Allegheny Ballroom

Conference Welcome / National Anthem

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

Presenters/Facilitators:

John Bechtel, COAA Conference Committee Chair

John Zahor, COAA President

Howie Ferguson, COAA Executive Director

Session 25A-04 | Wednesday, May 7 | 2:00-3:00pm

Location: Allegheny Ballroom

COAA Cares: Jared Box

COAA is excited to partner with [The Jared Box Project](#) at the conference in Pittsburgh. Jared Box's mission is to put a smile on the faces of children in the hospital. Attendees will have the opportunity to assemble boxes full of toys, games and age-appropriate trinkets for children, that will then be delivered to one or more children's hospitals.

In addition to packing boxes on Wednesday, attendees will have the opportunity to write encouraging notes and decorate the boxes throughout the conference.



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Session 25A-05A | Wednesday, May 7 | 3:30-5:00pm

Location: Westmoreland

Why Great Projects Have Charters

What matters most on a given project and how will success be defined? Even talented and well-meaning project teams can falter when these sorts of questions are not clearly answered up front. One proven best practice for codifying these answers and other project-specific information – both technical and cultural – is to create a project charter. Learn why charters are often behind the most successful projects ... what they normally include ... and how to collaboratively develop them.

Presenters/Facilitators:

Paul O'Keef, Virginia Tech

Dade Van Der Werf, VMDO

Kim Smith, VMDO

Jason Niebish, Ballinger

Session 25A-05B | Wednesday, May 7 | 3:30-5:00pm

Location: Allegheny Ballroom

The Generational Puzzle: Fitting the Pieces Together

This session dives into the complexities of teaming with the five generations that comprise today's workforce. Understanding the unique values and communication styles of each group is crucial ... to foster collaboration and create a workplace environment that helps attract and retain talent. We'll discuss turning generational challenges from a source of friction into a foundation for meaningful partnership and shared success. We'll also explore what makes each generation tick and how you can flex to meet their needs in a way they understand. No clichés or pigeonholing here – just honest & practical insights and ample room for audience participation.

Presenters/Facilitators:

Ann Leiner, Stacey & Associates



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Session 25A-05C | Wednesday, May 7 | 3:30-5:00pm

Location: Cambria

Design Assist and Delegated Design | Comparing, Contrasting, and Leveraging

The industry trend of obtaining early design input from, or placing full design responsibility on, certain trades can benefit projects in terms of constructability, innovation, and cost & time savings. But there are potential dangers for Owners who don't truly understand what these approaches entail or aren't skillful at proactively managing the collaborative processes. Hear firsthand insight into both positive and negative experiences, learn proven best practices, and better understand how to make your next project involving Design Assist or Delegated Design a success!

Presenters/Facilitators:

Cy Rangel, Purdue University

Greg Holness, FTI Consulting

Opening Night Reception | Wednesday, May 7 | 5:30-7:00pm

Location: Allegheny Prefunction

Kick off the conference with good vibes, great company, and a refreshing drink in hand! Join us for the Opening Night Reception—a relaxed evening designed to help you unwind, mingle with fellow attendees, and ease into the days ahead. Whether you're reconnecting with familiar faces or meeting someone new, this is the perfect opportunity to build relationships and set the tone for a memorable event.

Breakfast | Thursday, May 8 | 7:15-8:15am

Location: Allegheny Ballroom

Start your day off right with a hearty breakfast and a hot cup of coffee! Fuel up before diving into a full day of engaging sessions and insightful discussions. It's also a great time to catch up with colleagues, make new connections, and get energized for what's ahead.

Thursday Kickoff | Thursday, May 8 | 8:15-8:30am

Location: Allegheny Ballroom

Let's get things rolling! Join us for a brief but energizing welcome to set the tone for the day. We'll cover a few housekeeping items, spotlight key moments to look forward to, and get you inspired for a full day of learning and connection.



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Session 25A-06 | Thursday, May 8 | 8:30-9:30am

Location: Allegheny Ballroom

Seven Habits of Highly Effective Project Leaders

Project leadership on the Owner's side is a balancing act ... caught between mission-driven end users and delivery teams navigating inflation, delays, and complexity. The most effective project leaders aren't just task managers – they are calm in the chaos, clarity in the confusion, and accountability in the ambiguity. In this dynamic keynote, BJ Kraemer shares a leadership playbook built on real-world lessons from his time growing up in sports, leading in combat, managing capital project delivery, and building a company dedicated to project leadership in the built environment. Attendees will gain practical tools to lead with purpose, influence stakeholders, and elevate performance across every phase of a project.

Presenters/Facilitators:

BJ Kraemer, MCFA

Session 25A-07A | Thursday, May 8 | 9:45-10:45am

Location: Westmoreland

Seven Habits of Highly Effective Project Leaders: Let's Discuss

Spend an hour with BJ Kraemer to unpack his keynote address in a more intimate and interactive setting. Come armed with your own thoughts and experiences regarding leadership.

Presenters/Facilitators:

BJ Kraemer, MCFA



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Session 25A-07B | Thursday, May 8 | 9:45-10:45am

Location: Cambria

Overcoming Challenging Delivery Methods

The recently completed Environmental Compliance Facility for the Allegheny County (PA) Sanitary Authority (ALCOSAN) is a beautiful example of how collaborative problem-solving and stakeholder engagement can offset inherent challenges, including the project delivery method itself.

ALCOSAN, like other Pennsylvania municipalities, is required to use multiple prime delivery for capital projects. This approach is less than ideal, particularly with respect to fostering a collaborative project team culture, but ALCOSAN and their partners overcame that and many other constraints to deliver a cutting-edge, sustainable facility.

Learn how they did it and how their journey might reveal ideas for improving your project delivery processes, regardless of the delivery method and project type.

Presenters/Facilitators:

Cody Edgell, Allegheny County (PA) Sanitary Authority

Tiffany Haile, AE Works

Adam Homer, AE Works

John Harris, G Stephens

Session 25A-08A | Thursday, May 8 | 11:00am-12:00pm

Location: Cambria

Point/Counterpoint | OAC Perspectives on The COAA Way®

Success is often rooted in collaboration, but we may not always have the same perspectives during the journey. Come prepared to share your own thoughts after first hearing some candid back & forth from an experienced Owner, design professional, and builder.

Presenters/Facilitators:

Jim Carroll, Auburn University

Jack Stackalis, Whiting-Turner Contracting Co.

Dale Harvey, Arcadis



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Session 25A-08B | Thursday, May 8 | 11:00am-12:00pm

Location: Westmoreland

Enhancing Facility Design Through Experiential Optimization

This session offers an in-depth look at Experiential Optimization, an approach to enhance facility design through the integration of research-based evidence and user experience insights. Participants will learn how to merge quantitative data with qualitative assessments – journey mapping, environmental sensing, behavioral analysis, etc. – to gain a comprehensive understanding of how spaces are used and experienced. The discussion will also cover practical examples and case studies where Experiential Optimization has led to actionable recommendations for design and policy enhancements.

Presenters/Facilitators:

Melissa Hoelting, Corgan

Carissa Oyedele, Corgan

Sangeetha Karthik, Corgan

Scholarship Luncheon | Thursday, May 8 | 12:00-1:00pm

Location: Allegheny Ballroom

Join us for a special luncheon as we honor the next generation of AEC professionals. We'll recognize this year's scholarship recipients and celebrate their achievements, aspirations, and bright futures. Enjoy a delicious meal while supporting COAA's commitment to education, mentorship, and industry growth.



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Session 25A-09A | Thursday, May 8 | 1:15-2:15pm

Location: Westmoreland

Building Beyond Boundaries: Innovations in Offsite Construction

Explore how the UPMC Presbyterian Hospital project leveraged cutting edge offsite construction techniques and prefabrication to address challenges posed by a dense urban site, workforce constraints, and ambitious sustainability goals. This session will highlight collaborative approaches, innovative solutions, and lessons learned from integrating multi-trade prefabrication, modular systems, and Lean principles into a large-scale healthcare project.

Presenters/Facilitators:

Mike Schesler, University of Pittsburgh Medical Center

Kyle Weisman, HGA

Michael Blue, The Whiting-Turner Contracting Company

Session 25A-09B | Thursday, May 8 | 1:15-2:15pm

Location: Allegheny Ballroom

We Bought a Campus!

The University of Oregon embraced the challenge to renovate a vacated, 19-acre campus in Portland within 18 months just in time for classes to start. They shared with prospective builders and designers that the project promised to be both unique and challenging, while also noting that “it has the potential to be a real sh*!t show!” While that sort of statement might ruffle feathers, it demonstrated the “good Owner” qualities of honesty & transparency and made it clear that the Owner understood what they were asking of potential partners.

A single CM/GC was selected to execute multiple projects – designed by multiple A/E teams – while navigating an array of unknowns, challenges, and constraints.

Owner, contractor and designer will share the successes and obstacles that were overcome together primarily due to flexibility and a collaborative spirit established up front by a transparent Owner.

Presenters/Facilitators:

Darin Dehle, University of Oregon

Monica Hasek, University of Oregon

Summer Boron, Howard S. Wright, a Balfour Beatty Company

Joe Baldwin, Opsis



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Session 25A-10A | Thursday, May 8 | 2:45-3:45pm

Location: Westmoreland

Shaping the Future of Offsite Construction

Offsite construction methods, including full volumetric and panelized kit-of-part systems, are reshaping the future of building by increasing efficiency, reducing costs, and ensuring higher quality control. Both approaches offer significant benefits in terms of speed, sustainability, and adaptability, but aren't always the right fit for every project. See and hear how lessons learned over years have helped perfect the processes, and better understand when offsite approaches are and are not best for a given project.

Presenters/Facilitators:

MODLOGIC

Session 25A-10B | Thursday, May 8 | 2:45-3:45pm

Location: Allegheny Ballroom

Change Is Inevitable, Managing It Takes Work

Changes are an unavoidable part of any project, regardless of type or size. Proactively managing change is crucial to ensuring project success, controlling costs, and maintaining schedule. Through real-world examples and practical strategies, this session will equip participants with tools and best practices to efficiently manage change, minimize disruptions, and keep projects on track.

Presenters/Facilitators:

Sarah Delphin, MD Anderson Cancer Center



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Session 25A-11 | Thursday, May 8 | 4:00-5:00pm

Location: Allegheny Ballroom

Rapid Fire 640: Mentoring

An important part of retaining great talent is mentoring, whether informal or formal. Here's a chance to learn about the power of mentoring from several perspectives, as four presenters share their thoughts in rapid-fire mode. Each presenter has only six minutes and 40 seconds (20 slides at 20 seconds/slide = 6:40), which eliminates any chance you'll be bored and forces them to cut to the chase. Buckle in for rapid digestion and then be ready to share your thoughts on this important component of nurturing future leaders.

Jimmy Patel, Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Lab

Greg Kirk, State of Pennsylvania DGS

Angela Fante, Ballinger

Gus Maimis, STV Construction

Thursday Night Reception | Thursday, May 8 | 5:30-7:30pm

Location: Bill's Burgers and Taphouse

Wrap up the day—and the conference receptions—with good food, cold drinks, and great company at Bill's Burgers and Taphouse. This final gathering is your chance to relax, reflect on the week, and make the most of your time with fellow attendees before heading home. Come ready for one last round of laughs and connection!

Breakfast | Friday, May 9 | 7:30-8:30am

Location: Allegheny Ballroom

Rise, shine, and recover with our final breakfast together in the Allegheny Ballroom. Whether you're fueling up for the morning sessions or recapping last night's fun at Bill's Burgers, this is a great way to ease into the final day of the conference. Grab a plate, find a table, and enjoy one more chance to connect before we close things out!



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Session 25A-12A | Friday, May 9 | 8:30-9:30am

Location: Cambria

Breaking Free: How UI Health Leveraged P3

In 2018, the University of Illinois Hospital and Health Sciences System (UIH) embarked on a journey that led to the highly successful delivery of new healthcare space that serves critical needs in Chicago. As a state entity, UIH is normally constrained to Design-Bid-Build delivery. Understanding this large & complex project required a truly collaborative approach, UIH argued for and received permission to deliver via Public/Private Partnership (P3). P3 is rarely used in the U.S. for healthcare projects but was exactly the right choice for UIH as illustrated by a finished product completed a year ahead of schedule despite the addition of significant program (space) during design. Learn how the project team pulled this off and walk away with tangible ideas for breaking free from whatever might be constraining your project delivery process.

Presenters/Facilitators:

Julia Louie, UI Health Systems

Mike O'Keefe, Ankura

Thomas Longhi, Stantec Architecture

Dan Myers, Pepper Construction

Session 25A-12B | Friday, May 9 | 8:30-9:30am

Location: Westmoreland

Tariffs and Other Escalation Costs ... Let's Discuss Evaluating Escalation Costs

The last few years have seen increased escalation claims due to volatility caused by world events. Most recently, the still TBD impacts of federal tariffs are causing uncertainty and even panic. Entitlement to any portion of these increases is often not clearly defined or understood by all parties. Adding to the confusion, there are many variables to consider ... including market trends, procurement schedules, contractual requirements, and delays outside the control of contractors and suppliers. Diligent analysis is the key to making fair and equitable determinations for escalation requests. The session will provide tangible examples and encourage discussion and questions.

Presenters/Facilitators:

Andrew Reilly, Carnegie Mellon

Jake Ortego, HPM



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Session 25A-13A | Friday, May 9 | 9:45-10:45am

Location: Westmoreland

From Model Ts to Biomedical Research ...

A property where the Ford “Model T” was once manufactured now serves as a cutting-edge University of Pittsburgh (Pitt) cancer and immunology research facility. Talk about adaptive reuse! The finished product – dubbed The Assembly – helped Pitt achieve its goal of creating “a more connected, outward-looking, and engaged university,” while also demonstrating the power of unique and strategic approaches and partnerships. Discover how the innovative development, financial, and design solutions can be applied to a variety of Owners and learn how The Assembly honors the history of its site while supporting today’s critical research.

Learning Objectives:

Presenters/Facilitators:

Matthew Rendulic, U. of Pittsburgh

Deanna Keil, ZGF Architects

Michael Dembert, Wexford Science + Technology

Session 25A-13B | Friday, May 9 | 9:45-10:45am

Location: Cambria

Maximizing the User/Occupant Experience

A measure of success for many projects, regardless of type or sector, is improving the experience of those who will use or occupy the new or renovated space. From healthcare and retail to higher education and theme parks, Owners have learned that their built environment directly impacts occupant or customer satisfaction, staff retention, sales, and other metrics.

Wayne State University understood this when repurposing a 1948 classroom building that is now an inviting and agile centerpiece of the campus. Learn how the project team balanced the user experience goal with others (cost, schedule, sustainability, etc.) through broadened & inclusive communication, early cost modeling, and other strategies.

Presenters/Facilitators:

Edward Doyle, Wayne State U.

Bill Ash, SmithGroup



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Session 25A-14 | Friday, May 9 | 11:00am-12:00pm

Location: Westmoreland

Owner's Roundtable

Always one of the highest-rated sessions at each COAA conference, this unstructured discussion allows for professional-to-professional sharing of challenges, best practices, and lessons learned.

Presenters/Facilitators:

John Zahor

Lunch | Friday, May 9 | 12:00-1:00pm

Location: Allegheny Ballroom

Join us for a final meal with fellow attendees as we wrap up an inspiring and productive conference. It's a chance to reflect, exchange goodbyes (or see-you-laters), and celebrate the connections made. While this is our official closing lunch, don't forget—two optional post-conference events follow. Separate registration is required to attend these additional sessions.

Session 25A-15 | Friday, May 9 | 1:00-3:00pm

Location: Meet in Lobby

Optional UPMC Prefabrication Shop and Project Tour

See for yourself how UPMC Presbyterian Hospital project leveraged cutting edge offsite construction techniques and prefabrication to address challenges posed by a dense urban site, workforce constraints, and ambitious sustainability goals. Tour the prefabrication shop and on Friday afternoon, where you will see the various stages of the prefabricated modules being assembled. You do not want to miss this opportunity! *additional registration is required

Baseball Game | Friday, May 9 | 6:40-10:00pm

Location: PNC Park, meet at baseball game

Optional Pirates vs Braves Baseball Game

Extend your stay in Pittsburgh and join us at beautiful PNC Park for the Pirates vs. Braves game on Friday night, May 9 at 6:40 PM EST. Our block seating includes all-you-can-eat munchies and incredible views of the city. Seats are limited, so don't procrastinate!

