

ANNUAL CONFERENCE



**Welcome to
Nashville!**

**Get Ready to
Kick Up Your
Success!**

National Rural Economic
Developers Association
Annual Conference
November 5 - 7, 2025

**NREDA'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS
welcomes you to the
2025 Annual Conference!**

The conference agenda offers exciting opportunities to build your knowledge, best practices library and personal connections. But, it is up to YOU to make the most of your time in Nashville!

If you have any questions, board members, conference committee members and the NREDA staff are all ready to help you have a great learning and networking experience – just look for our ribbons!



TUESDAY | NOV | 4th | 2025

- 5:00 – 6:30: Pre-conference networking reception

WEDNESDAY | NOV | 5th | 2025

Morning Pre-conference:

- 9:15 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.– Walking Tour: Jeff Kolb, Nashville Downtown Partnership
 - Includes a presentation about the Lower Broadway history, activities that have reinvented the district, and then a downtown walking tour. (\$25.00)
- 9:15 – 11:15a.m. Pre-Conference Session: Chellie Phillips (\$50.00)
 - Program: When in Doubt, Delete It
 - Do you feel like you're juggling hundreds of tasks but still not thriving in your professional or personal life? What if a few small shifts in your daily approach could unlock your potential and make you indispensable at work and at home? Discover how to align your daily actions with goals, embrace proactive strategies to drive results and cultivate a mindset that fosters personal growth and professional excellence – all while staying true to your authentic self. Leave this session equipped to edit out the clutter, insert strategies for success and power up your impact.
- 11:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. – First-Time Attendee Luncheon
- 1:00 p.m. – 1:15 p.m. – Conference welcome
- 1:15 p.m. – 2:15 p.m. – Conference Kick-off Keynote: Paul Mellor
 - Program: Memory Power
 - A high-energy program that increases attendees' ability to remember names and faces, sharpens their concentration skills, and delivers time-management skills that get them through the day without the fear of forgetting.



WEDNESDAY | NOV | 5th | 2025

- 2:15p.m. – 2:30 p.m. – Break
- 2:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m. – Powering the Future of Rural Energy Needs
 - A panel discussion about the power needs for rural spaces and the power demands arising from broadband operators who are supporting data centers and Artificial Intelligence (AI) traffic in rural areas. Panelists: Tyler Chaffee, Tennessee Valley Authority and Fayyaz Patwa, NOKIA
- 3:30 p.m. – 3:40 p.m. – Break
- 3:40p.m. – 4:40 p.m. – Defining, Defusing & Defeating a Crisis: A Handbook for Rural Risk Management
 - Economic development always comes with risk: Will carefully fostered growth bring prosperity or unwanted community impacts? Will short-term cost-cutting bring financial health or frail infrastructure? Will prospective investments attract desired outcomes or become intractable sunk costs? In rural communities with limited resources, the margins for managing these challenges can be quite small while the need for addressing risk and identifying potential future crises is critical. This panel of Tennessee-based crisis counseling and communications consultants will draw on their combined decades of expertise assisting corporate, government, small business, utility sector and other clients to lay out a thoughtful approach for economic developers to follow in becoming crisis management champions for their communities. Panelists Aileen Katcher, Public Relations and Crisis Consultant with Katcher Strategic Communications; Jenny Barker, Public Relations Counselor with Gray Owl Strategy; and Brooks Christol, owner and Chief Strategy Officer for Barker & Christol.
- 4:40 p.m. – 4:45 p.m. – Closing remarks
- 5:30p.m. – 9:30 p.m. – President's reception – featuring the Talbott Brothers



THURSDAY | NOV | 6th | 2025

- 8:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m. – Breakfast & Awards – Intro to United First Aid (Iowa's Lieutenant Governor)
- 9:15 a.m. – 10:15 a.m. – Breakout Learning Sessions
 - Cyber Security – Michael Ramage, Cyber Education & Research Center, Murray State University
 - We all must take cybersecurity seriously – no matter the size of organization. Hear stories and gain tips to help your organizations and businesses be more cyber aware and prepare for threats in an increasingly sophisticated environment.
 - Career Pathways – Bo Jones and Sam Witherby
 - Learn about a new workforce development tool for matching students 13 and up with companies in their areas of interest. Careerpathway.com is a "match.com" type of platform for education and business to work together on talent pipelines and filling positions. Students can remain on the platform as adults to connect with job opportunities. The program started in Lincoln, Nebraska and is now in 30+ states.
 - Building redevelopment – Mark Forester, Spark Center
 - Learn about a 350k+ facility redevelopment project, the multiple partners engaged in the project, and its current status in use for economic development purposes.
 - United First Aid – Iowa's Lt. Governor Chris Cournoyer and Guests
 - Hear about Iowa's United First Aid pilot program, a rural EMS program that aims to leverage technology and volunteers to address challenges in rural emergency response. The pilot's successes and challenges will be shared, as well as the ongoing goals for improvement.
- 10:15 a.m. – 10:30 a.m. – Break



THURSDAY | NOV | 6th | 2025

- 10:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. – Breakouts repeat
- 11:30 a.m. – 12:45 p.m. – Lunch and Learn – Dolly Parton's Imagination Library
- 1:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m. – Geopolitics, Trade Policies and Their Impact on Rural America
 - The world today is a small place. What happens in Europe or Asia can directly affect rural America whether it be in site selection, your company's supply chain or meeting their labor needs. Join Charlie Smith, Geopolitical Strategist, for insight into the impact that trade policies, geopolitical shifts, and risks can have on our rural communities.
- 2:15 p.m. – 4:30 p.m. – Mobile Classrooms
 - Lebanon Downtown Revitalization
 - Cheatham County Manufacturing Tour
 - Trolley Barn Reuse & Revitalization – Nashville Entrepreneur Center
 - Board of Director Development & Impactful Engagement – On-site
 - Lorie Vincent & Friday Otuya
 - Join Lorie Vincent and Friday Otuya as they present diverse perspectives on Board Development and Impactful Engagement. This session will explore various strategies for developing both individual board members and boards as a whole, with the goal of increasing engagement and inspiring passionate participation. Key discussion points will include intentional board selection, effective training, fostering diversity, encouraging open communication, and ensuring alignment with the board's mission. While approaches may differ, the core message remains the same: active, intentional effort is essential. Attendees will leave with practical insights to help build boards driven by purpose and enthusiasm rather than obligation.
- 4:45 p.m. – 6:15 p.m. – Reception



FRIDAY | NOV | 7th | 2025

- 8:15 a.m. – 9:15 a.m. – Breakfast/committee updates/Annual meeting
- 9:15 a.m. – 10:15 a.m.– Learning session
 - Site Selection Trends and How Rural Communities Can Compete
 - Panel: Taylor Oswald, Evergreen Capital Strategies; Nelson Lindsey, Parker Poe; Jennifer Fletcher, Deloitte
- 10:15 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.– Break
- 10:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. – Conference Send-off
 - JoeMax Higgins, CEO of Golden Triangle Development Link
- 11:30 a.m. – 11:45 a.m. – Closing

**THANK YOU TO
OUR SPONSORS!**

**SEE YOU in SALT LAKE CITY
in 2026!**

**SAVE THE DATE:
NOVEMBER 3RD – 6TH**