

OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2025

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF



OHIO CHAPTER



SNEAK PEEK INTO
NAVIGATE PAGE 14

Innovation in Action

Leading with Adaptability

Building Emotional Endurance

Collaboration That Works

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF MPI OHIO CHAPTER.

Define is the official publication of the Ohio Chapter of Meeting Professionals International. It is published quarterly as a benefit of membership and circulated free of charge to MPIOH members.

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OUR MISSION

To enhance the overall quality and awareness of the meetings industry by ensuring the professional development and growth of its membership through targeted educational programs and networking opportunities.



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PRESIDENT'S LETTER



As we close out 2025, I find myself reflecting on a year defined by growth, momentum, and meaningful connection. Serving as President of the MPI Ohio Chapter has been both an honor and a responsibility I have taken seriously, and this final issue of DEFINE during my term feels like the right moment to pause and say thank you.

Thank you to our Board of Directors, committee leaders, volunteers, sponsors, and members who consistently show up with generosity, curiosity, and a willingness to move our chapter forward. The work featured in this issue reflects the strength of our community. From thoughtful leadership perspectives to practical tools that make our work easier, DEFINE continues to be a place where real ideas and real experiences are shared.

This quarter's content highlights innovation in action, not as a buzzword, but as something grounded in adaptability, emotional endurance, collaboration, and leadership at every level. These are themes we have returned to often this year because they matter. Our industry is complex, fast-moving, and deeply human. The professionals in this chapter continue to meet that reality with creativity, resilience, and care for one another.

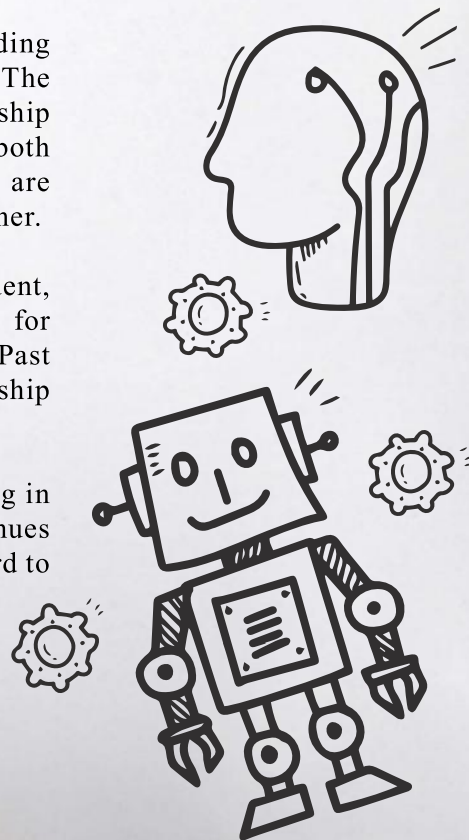
I am especially proud of the direction MPI Ohio is heading as we look toward Navigate and Elevate in 2026. The conference, along with programs like the new Mentorship Connection, reflects a chapter that is investing in both future leaders and seasoned professionals. We are building something intentional and sustainable together.

While this marks my final DEFINE letter as President, it is not the end of my involvement. I am grateful for the opportunity to continue serving the chapter as Past President in 2025, supporting the Board and leadership team as we navigate what comes next.

Thank you for trusting me with this role, for engaging in the work, and for contributing to a chapter that continues to raise the bar for our industry in Ohio. I look forward to what we will accomplish together in the year ahead.

With gratitude,

Adam Kowaleski
President, MPI Ohio Chapter



2026

MPI OHIO CHAPTER

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WELCOME *to our* *New* MEMBERS!

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INNOVATIVE TECH

THAT'S ACTUALLY MAKING OUR WORK EASIER

BY:

MADISON HORNSBY

If there's one thing event professionals don't have a lot of, it's time. Between juggling proposals, site visits, planning calls, and what feels like an endless stream of emails, we're constantly searching for tools that help us work smarter without adding more noise. Over the last year, I've leaned into a handful of emerging technologies that have genuinely changed the way I plan, present, and collaborate. None of them replace the human side of our work (and honestly, I wouldn't want them to), but they've made the day-to-day tasks that support creativity and connection a whole lot easier.

One of the most surprising game changers has been Gamma, an AI-powered presentation and proposal builder. Instead of wrestling with layouts or hunting for the right template, I can feed Gamma the core content for an event outline, a bid summary, or meeting specs, and it generates a clean, visually consistent presentation in minutes. The time saved goes straight back into the strategy and storytelling that make proposals stand out. What I appreciate most is that it doesn't feel like a shortcut; it feels like a partner that handles the design lift so I can focus on communicating value.

For visual content, Canva's AI tools have become a quiet hero in my workflow. When a quick graphic is needed for a pitch or when I want to refresh collateral before sending it to a planner, the AI-assisted layout and image-generation tools help tighten the look without waiting on a designer. Again, it's not about replacing creativity it's about having the flexibility to produce clean, polished visuals on tight timelines.

On the efficiency side, Otter.ai has been one of the most practical tools I've adopted this year. I use it directly in my Zoom and Teams calls, where it automatically generates real-time transcripts of the conversation. Instead of scrambling for notes or trying to remember key details days later, Otter.ai gives me a complete, searchable record of every discussion—action items, dates, follow-up requests, and even speaker labels. After each call, I can quickly export those notes and drop them into my CRM, so nothing falls through the cracks. It keeps me fully present during meetings while still capturing the details that matter.



What all these tools have in common is that they enhance—not replace—the human parts of our work. They free up the space we need to listen better, plan smarter, and create more meaningful experiences for the groups we serve. Innovation in our industry isn't always flashy. Sometimes it's the quiet, practical upgrades that help us show up as better partners.

And honestly, that's the kind of tech I'll always make room for.



Want to learn more about AI?

Check out the sneak peek from
Nick Borelli, speaking at
Navigate 2026 on page 20



MADISON HORNSBY

SALES MANAGER - SPORTS, MEETINGS & EVENTS,
CLERMONT COUNTY CVB

Madison is the Sales Manager at the Clermont County Convention and Visitors Bureau, where she focuses on attracting sports events, group tours, and meetings to the region. A graduate of the University of Cincinnati's Lindner College of Business, she combines her background in marketing with a passion for community-building, travel, and youth athletics. Madison brings energy, creativity, and a strong sense of collaboration to every opportunity she takes on.

MPI OHIO CHAPTER MEETING

BUILT FROM THE INSIDE™ TO WORK SMARTER WITH AI
WITH WHITNEY L. BARKLEY, M.S., OWNER OF SPEAKERAZZI®
AND CREATOR OF THE BUILT FROM THE INSIDE™ FRAMEWORK.



THANK YOU
EVENT SPONSORS



Thank you to everyone who joined us on October 15 at the Summit Hotel Cincinnati for our Chapter Meeting with Whitney L. Barkley, M.S., owner of Speakerazzi and creator of the Built From the Inside™ Framework. Her session, Built From the Inside™ to Work Smarter With AI, offered practical insight on using AI with intention, clarity, and confidence.

2026

Sponsorship & Advertising Opportunities



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- MPI OHIO - *Mentorship Connection*

The MPI Ohio Chapter is introducing a new Mentorship Connection program designed to strengthen our community and support professional growth across the meetings and events industry. This initiative connects active MPI Ohio members through intentional mentorship relationships that encourage knowledge sharing, leadership development, and meaningful connection within the chapter.

Mentorship Connection was created to help develop future leaders while also providing value to seasoned professionals. The program supports skill-building, collaboration, and a deeper understanding of both the industry and the role MPI Ohio plays in supporting its members. Participants benefit from shared experience, fresh perspective, and open dialogue around real-world challenges and opportunities.

The program will run from February through October 2026 and will officially launch at Navigate 2026. Throughout the program, the committee will provide periodic check-ins to support both mentors and mentees, helping ensure productive connections and ongoing momentum.

Members with questions or interest in participating in future mentorship opportunities are encouraged to reach out to Regina Piercefield at admin@mpioh.org or Brandon Blankenship at Brandon.Blankenship@Hilton.com

All we need is your time and willingness to make a difference.

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FINDING MY NICHE

A STORY ABOUT RIDING MOMENTUM AND EMBRACING ADAPTATION

A black and white portrait of a woman with long, wavy hair, smiling at the camera. She is wearing a striped, short-sleeved top with a wide neckline. The background is a plain, light color.

KYLIE
WHITEFORD

Content Curation +
Instagram Marketing
by the Whiteford Social

I started in the wedding industry as a videographer because I loved uncovering the “story” behind what makes someone unique. For a while, it was fulfilling – but eventually I realized my true passion wasn’t creating for couples. I was far more energized by working with creative small businesses, people who had a different kind of love: a love for what they built from the ground up.

At events, I’d watch makers, artists, and vendors show off incredible work that never seemed to make it to their portfolios. I began offering simple iPhone videos so they’d have accessible marketing content. I didn’t care about metrics; I cared about showcasing their talent to modern clients. I quickly noticed that while many creatives had websites, they weren’t updating them – and the modern-day client was relying almost entirely on social media to choose their vendors.

Providing high-quality, ready-to-use footage helped creatives present their work in a fresh, compelling way, and the response was immediate. I realized supporting small businesses had a deeper impact on me than producing wedding films. It felt needed, especially in an industry where content creators were often seen as competition rather than an asset. With wedding content creators focusing on the needs of the couple, I was able to focus on capturing the needs of the vendors.

Another shift came when one client asked me to manage her Instagram. She knew it mattered, and had tons of fresh media to share, but didn't know how to use it effectively. That opened my eyes to how many creatives felt overwhelmed by social media yet depended on it to reach their audience. Once I offered management, my client list grew quickly. It became clear that small businesses do understand the value – they just need guidance.

As I saw the demand, I expanded into website support to help creatives present a consistent, intentional brand across every platform. Today, I focus on creating instantly shareable content that keeps portfolios current, builds trust, and helps businesses book more events.

Riding the momentum of what works, I continue to adapt – because sometimes you find your niche the moment you stop searching for it.





FEBRUARY 23 & 24
2026



EMBASSY
SUITES
COLUMBUS DUBLIN

SNEAK PEEK

INTO NAVIGATE 2026

Navigate is where the meetings and events industry comes to sharpen its thinking, challenge assumptions, and reconnect with what makes this work meaningful. Hosted by the MPI Ohio Chapter, Navigate 2026 brings together planners, suppliers, and industry partners for two days of learning, conversation, and momentum-setting for the year ahead.

Navigate 2026 takes place February 23 and 24 at the Embassy Suites by Hilton in Dublin, Ohio, and features a thoughtfully curated agenda designed for today's realities. From emerging technology and data-driven decision-making to contracting strategy, leadership, collaboration, and emotional endurance, the conference meets professionals where they are and pushes the industry forward.

This year's program is led by featured speakers Molly Ketchum, Chad J. Willett, and Nick Borelli, nationally recognized voices shaping how event professionals lead, communicate, and innovate. They are joined by an accomplished lineup of industry leaders including Melinda Huntley, Mark Bice, Laurie Sharp-Page, Adriane Cesa, and Lyndzi Barnes, each bringing practical insight and real-world experience to the stage. Together, the agenda spans hands-on AI challenges, advanced skill-building sessions, leadership development, and thoughtful conversations about partnership, performance, and the unseen labor behind great events.

Day two of Navigate includes the ELEVATE Awards, integrated into the conference program to recognize outstanding professionals, organizations, and achievements within the meetings and events community. The awards offer a meaningful moment of recognition while reinforcing the values and standards that continue to move the industry forward.

Navigate is not about chasing trends for the sake of novelty. It is about equipping event professionals with practical tools, fresh perspective, and the confidence to lead with clarity in an increasingly complex environment.

To offer a closer look at what attendees can expect, the following pages feature sneak previews of three Navigate 2026 sessions. Through the voices of Melinda Huntley, Laurie Sharp-Page, and Chad J. Willett, these articles explore collaboration, emotional endurance, and innovative leadership, three themes shaping the future of meetings and events.



FEBRUARY 23 & 24

2026

THE VIEW FROM EVERY BADGE

If my career was a site visit, I'd be wearing three name badges - CVB, venue, and planner.

In my CVB days, I was the connector. My job was to champion the destination, introduce the right people, and insist, "We can make this work," even when it meant stitching together odd room blocks, off-site venues, and transportation jigsaw puzzles.

Later, working inside a venue, the view shifted. I saw the pressure of back-to-back events, the reality of staffing shortages, and the tightrope between saying "yes" to keep the business and protecting the team from burnout. I watched planners arrive with impossible timelines, vague goals, or internal politics they couldn't say out loud, but I could feel them in every decision.

Now, as a planner, I carry all of that with me.

I know that when a CVB is brought in early, they can open doors you didn't know existed, such as funding sources, local partners, experiences that turn a standard reception into something people talk about for years. I know a venue team will move mountains if they understand the "why" behind an event, not just the run-of-show.

And I know how often we accidentally work against each other simply because we don't see the full picture.

The real magic in events doesn't come from a wow moment on stage. It comes from the quiet behind-the-scenes collaboration long before anyone posts a selfie in front of a giant grape cluster balloon. It's in the planner who shares the real success metrics, the CVB that suggests an unexpected local partner, and the venue manager who says, "We can't do that exactly - but here's what we can do."

When CVBs, venues, and planners plan with each other instead of merely around each other, events stop feeling like a series of negotiations and start feeling like something closer to magic.

MELINDA HUNTLEY

Melinda Huntley is the Executive Director of the Ohio Travel Association, where she represents and supports Ohio's \$47 billion tourism industry through advocacy, professional development, and statewide collaboration.



I'M FINE. IT'S FINE. EVERYTHING'S FINE.



Meeting planners are trained to keep things moving, no matter what is happening behind the scenes. We absorb stress so others do not have to, manage competing expectations, and make high-pressure decisions in real time, all while maintaining a calm, professional presence. It is a skill that defines the profession, and one that often goes unnoticed until it starts to take a toll.

In her upcoming session, Laurie Sharp-Page brings attention to the emotional labor embedded in the role of meeting planner. Beyond timelines and logistics, planners are constantly regulating energy in the room, supporting clients through high-stakes moments, and carrying responsibility that extends far beyond what appears in a run-of-show. Over time, that quiet emotional load can drain even the most capable, experienced professionals.

Rather than framing this as burnout or self-care, Laurie introduces emotional endurance as an essential professional competency. She explores how emotional depletion shows up long before performance slips, and why many planners do not recognize the signs until they are already running on empty.

Through practical, real-world strategies, the session focuses on protecting energy, setting sustainable boundaries, and maintaining clarity without sacrificing empathy or effectiveness. The goal is not to do less, but to preserve the capacity to keep doing this work well.

This session is for planners who love what they do, who take pride in showing up prepared and composed.



LAURIE SHARP-PAGE

Laurie Sharp-Page is the Chief Coping Officer at Sprouting Change, a clinical leader and educator who helps individuals and teams build emotional endurance through practical, research-backed coping skills.



THE INNOVATIVE LEADER

LESSONS FROM BROADWAY STAGES TO HOLLYWOOD FILM SETS

CONFERENCE
SNEAK PEEK

Innovation is not about having the best ideas. It is about how leaders show up when plans change, pressure rises, and teams look to them for direction.

In *The Innovative Leader*, Chad J. Willett uses lessons from Broadway stages and Hollywood film sets to show how great leaders adapt, challenge assumptions, and turn vision into action. Drawing from the role of a director, Chad explores how leadership decisions made in real time can either stall creativity or unlock it.


The session focuses on three core leadership behaviors. First, adaptability. Leaders learn how to make thoughtful, spontaneous decisions without losing clarity or confidence. Second, challenging the status quo. Chad pushes leaders to ask better questions, take smart risks, and create environments where new ideas are welcomed instead of shut down. Third, teamwork. Just as a film relies on every role working together, innovation at work depends on leaders who recognize that every team member contributes to the final result.

At its core, this session is about blending vision with execution. Leaders leave with practical strategies for moving ideas off the whiteboard and into reality, inspiring teams not just to follow direction, but to believe in the work they are creating together.



CHAD J. WILLETT

Chad J. Willett is a TEDx speaker, two-time author, and founder of Broadway2LA Acting Studio. He blends his experience in entertainment and corporate leadership to help organizations build innovative, adaptable, and high-performing teams.



In my keynote, The Innovative Leader, I bring lessons from the stage and screen straight to your organization, giving your leaders practical strategies to transform the way they lead and inspire.

** Key Takeaways*

ADAPTABILITY. The director's ability to improvise and make spontaneous decisions with thoughtful consideration will determine the fate of the movie.

At work, your leaders will **ADAPT** by learning how to make spontaneous decisions with thoughtful consideration, which will unleash innovation at your workplace.

CHALLENGING THE STATUS QUO: Directors challenge the status quo by telling stories out of order, changing the picture grade, and getting actors to take emotional risks that expose them and make them vulnerable.

At work, leaders challenge the **STATUS QUO** by asking, "Why do we do it this way?" and "What if we tried something new?" Those questions ignite innovation.

TEAMWORK. From craft services to overseeing extras, the director's ability to get everyone working as a team is crucial to the quality of the film.

In the workplace, your leaders will exemplify **TEAMWORK**, knowing that all employees are on the same team, working to make your brand the best it can be.

BLEND VISION WITH EXECUTION: Directors start with a story in mind, and once on set, they capture the "magic" that brings it to life.

In the workplace, leaders do the same—blending **VISION** with execution by not only generating ideas but turning them into reality through a clear Innovation Plan.

** Final Curtain*

By applying lessons from Broadway and Hollywood, your leaders won't just direct teams—they'll inspire innovation that wins.

AI ISN'T REPLACING EVENT PLANNERS. IT'S EXPOSING HOW MUCH BUSYWORK WE'VE BEEN CARRYING.

When meeting planners hear “AI,” the fear is rarely about intelligence. It’s about workload. It sounds like one more technology to master, one more system demanding attention. The bigger misconception is that planners have to use AI the way other industries do, especially marketers. That framing alone is enough to turn people off.

Here’s the uncomfortable truth: if AI feels threatening, it’s usually because too much of your time is spent on work that shouldn’t require your experience in the first place.

Generative AI does not ask you to learn code or technical systems. It runs on natural language. You didn’t get a new platform. You got an intern who never sleeps and waits for direction. The skill is not technical fluency. It’s delegation.

AI’s biggest immediate value is killing the blank page. Session descriptions, attendee emails, sponsor activation ideas, post-event summaries, survey analysis. These aren’t the reasons most people got into events, yet they consume enormous energy. AI gives you a starting point, alternate perspectives, and drafts that you refine with judgment and taste. The humanity doesn’t disappear. It finally has room to show up.

Data-driven decision-making is where this gets interesting. In my work with attendee behavioral data, AI doesn’t replace instinct, it tests it. You are still the strategist. AI simply allows you to ask better questions faster. Patterns across ten years of surveys. Which activations actually create positive sentiment. Whether session length is helping or hurting engagement. These insights have been available. We just haven’t had the time to uncover them.

None of this is without responsibility. AI learns from what you give it. Attendee trust doesn’t end at registration. Ethical use and data privacy are not optional side conversations.

AI can be a mentor, a collaborator, or a workhorse. The real risk isn’t AI doing your job. It’s realizing how much of your job never needed you in the first place.



NICK BORELLI

As the director of marketing for the ethical AI company, Zenus, Nick Borelli, is at the intersection of marketing, events and tech. He is also the instructor for the Event Leadership Institute’s Enhancing Events with AI Course and a speaker and facilitator on the topic of AI solutions for meeting and event organizers. His work with Zenus is focused on educating the industry on the need for more return on experience data.



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How It Works

Members in good standing who have brought a friend to a meeting are entered into a drawing for a \$100 gift card. If that guest joins MPI Ohio Chapter, receive double entries. Promotion is ongoing through December 2026. Drawing will take place at Navigate 2027. Be sure to list your guest's name on your event registration form.

ELEVATE 2026

ELEVATE AT NAVIGATE

A CELEBRATION OF OUR COMMUNITY

Each year, MPI Ohio takes time to pause and recognize the people who strengthen our chapter and elevate the meetings and events industry across the state. That moment happens at ELEVATE, our annual Member Recognition and Fundraising Event, which will take place as part of the 2026 Navigate Conference.

ELEVATE brings our community together for an afternoon of connection, celebration, and generosity. Hosted during Navigate, the event highlights the leaders, volunteers, planners, and suppliers who contribute their time, creativity, and expertise to moving our profession forward. It is also an important fundraiser that supports MPI Ohio's educational programs, member initiatives, and future leadership development.

This year, ELEVATE will take place on February 24, 2026 from 12:00 PM to 2:00 PM, offering attendees the opportunity to connect with peers, participate in the silent auction, and celebrate our chapter in a meaningful way. While ELEVATE is included with Navigate registration, members also have the option to attend the recognition luncheon on its own.

In addition to attending, members and partners are encouraged to support ELEVATE through donations to the silent auction and Punch Wall. Auction contributions range from hotel packages and dining experiences to event tickets, gift baskets, and gift cards. Every donated item helps fund programming and resources that benefit meeting and event professionals throughout Ohio.

Whether you join us as part of the full Navigate experience, attend the ELEVATE luncheon, or contribute an auction item, your participation helps strengthen our chapter and support the future of our industry. We look forward to celebrating together at Navigate.



ELEVATE AWARDS 2024

BEYOND THE CHAT BOT



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January 28 2026

MPI Ohio Educational Webinar
ZOOM

February 23 & 24 2026

**Navigate Conference
+ ELEVATE Awards**
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Dublin OH*

April 15 2026

Chapter Meeting
*The Ritz Carlton -
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MAY 20 2026

Chapter Meeting
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**All dates & locations
are subject to change*

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***Call or email Katie Baker, Director of Strategic Partnerships,
to secure your date at education@mpioh.org***

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OHIO
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Contact: Josh Bricker

Email: OfficeOfPresident@mpioh.org

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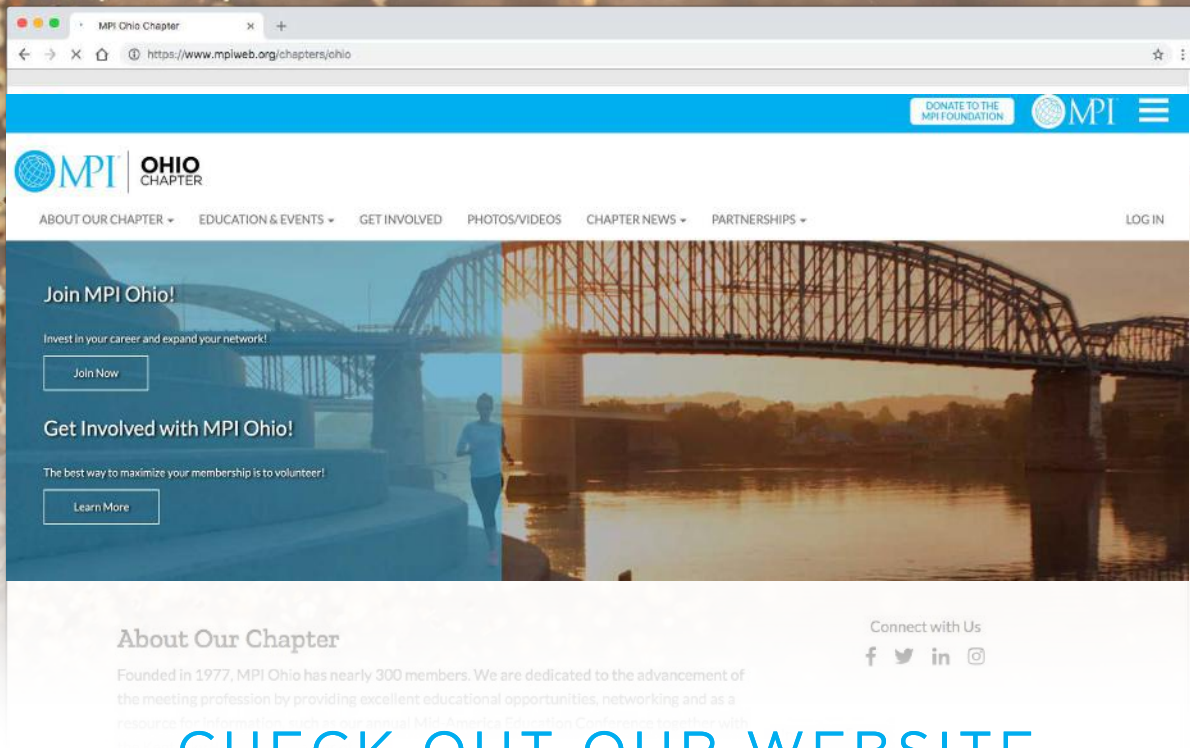
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