

JANUARY - JUNE 2026

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF



OHIO CHAPTER



Navigate Recap
Elevate Winners
Unlocking Influence
Through Human Connection
Data Is Your Defense

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF MPI OHIO CHAPTER.

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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



When it came time to write this letter, I found myself looking back at the conversations we've had as a chapter over the past several months. While the topics have varied, a common theme kept emerging: our industry continues to evolve, but the importance of people and relationships remains constant.

We started the year at Navigate, where we explored everything from leadership and communication to technology and data. In this issue, you'll hear from two of our presenters, Molly Ketcham and Nick Borelli. While they approach the industry from different angles, both reinforce something I've been thinking about a lot lately. Success is rarely about a single tool, strategy, or piece of technology. It's about how we connect with

people and how we use the resources available to create better experiences and stronger outcomes.

That same theme carried through our chapter meeting in Cleveland, where we learned about the planning and partnerships behind major sporting events. It was evident again during Global Meetings Industry Day, when we celebrated the impact our profession has on businesses, destinations, and communities. Most recently, at our chapter meeting in Cincinnati, discussions around artificial intelligence, attendee behavior, and event strategy all led back to a similar conclusion: relationships still matter.

In between those events, the MPI Ohio Board gathered for our mid-year retreat. Earlier this year, I shared that we would focus on strengthening the chapter and continuing to deliver value for our members. I'm proud of the progress we've made so far, and I'm even more excited about where we're headed.

Our industry will continue to change. New technology will emerge, attendee expectations will shift, and new challenges will always be waiting around the corner. Through it all, I believe the connections we build with one another will remain one of our greatest strengths.

Thank you for being part of MPI Ohio. I hope you enjoy this issue of DEFINE, and I look forward to seeing you at an upcoming event.

Josh Bricker

President, MPI Ohio Chapter

2026

MPI OHIO CHAPTER

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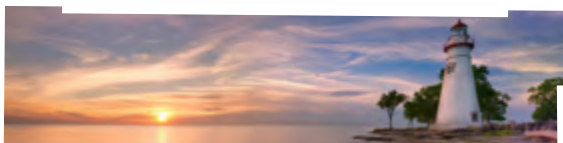
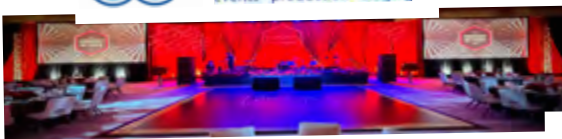
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The CARA Code:

Unlocking Influence Through Human Connection



By: Molly Ketcham

The meetings and events industry is built on experiences.

We carefully design environments that shape how people feel. We think about room sets, menus, lighting, music, technology, attendee flow, and countless other details because we understand that the experience matters just as much as the content itself.

Yet one of the most influential parts of any event experience is rarely listed on a planning timeline.

It's the conversations.

Whether you're working with a client, leading a team, collaborating with a supplier, engaging volunteers, or networking at a conference, every interaction creates an experience. Long after attendees have forgotten what was served at lunch or which breakout session they attended, they'll remember how people made them feel.

Conversations Have A Rhythm

As a classically trained pianist, I've always been fascinated by the way music creates emotion. A great piece of music doesn't begin with its most powerful moment. It unfolds. It captures attention, builds anticipation, creates tension and release, and ultimately leaves the listener feeling something.

The best conversations follow a similar pattern.

Over the years, I've come to think of conversations as compositions. Like music, they have a rhythm. They build. They create anticipation. And when handled well, they leave a lasting impression.

This observation led me to develop what I call the CARA Code: Curiosity, Attunement, Resonance, and Amplification. While the framework is simple, its impact can be profound because it focuses on something many professionals overlook. Influence isn't created through expertise alone. It's created through the experience people have when they interact with you.

Listening For What Matters

Every meaningful conversation begins with curiosity.

In our industry, it's easy for conversations to become transactional. We discuss timelines, budgets, room blocks, contracts, and deliverables. Those conversations are important, but they rarely build the kind of trust that leads to long-term partnerships.

Trust begins when we move beyond logistics and become genuinely interested in the person sitting across from us.

Years ago, I started asking clients different questions. Instead of focusing exclusively on what they needed, I became curious about why it mattered. What would success look like for them personally? What concerns were keeping them up at night? What pressures were they facing that weren't written in the RFP?

The quality of the conversation changed almost immediately.

People often assume curiosity is about gathering information. In the CARA Code, curiosity communicates value. It tells the other person, "You matter enough for me to want to understand you."

But curiosity alone isn't enough.

Many of us ask great questions and then immediately begin thinking about what we're going to say next. We hear the words, but we miss the meaning.



That's where attunement comes in.

Attunement is the ability to listen beyond the surface. It's noticing the excitement in someone's voice when they talk about a new initiative. It's recognizing hesitation when discussing a budget concern. It's hearing what isn't being said as much as what is.

Musicians do this naturally. They are constantly listening and adjusting to one another. If one performer changes tempo or dynamics, the others respond. The music stays connected because everyone is paying attention.

The same thing happens in conversations.

When people feel that level of attention, their guard begins to come down. They stop wondering whether you're waiting for your turn to speak and start feeling confident that you're truly listening.

And that's where resonance becomes possible.

Creating Moments That Last

Resonance is the moment when someone feels understood.

You can almost see it happen. Their shoulders relax. Their expression changes. Sometimes they respond with a simple phrase like, "Exactly," or "That's what I've been trying to say."

What's interesting is that resonance doesn't require agreement. You don't have to solve someone's problem or share their perspective. You simply need to demonstrate that you understand their experience.

In leadership, client relationships, and team dynamics, this is often the moment when trust deepens. People become more open to ideas, feedback, and collaboration because they feel seen before they feel persuaded.

This is a beautiful connection. But I'll be honest, I've noticed that we tend to rush past these moments.

We have another meeting to attend. Another email to answer. Another problem to solve.

That's why the final step, amplification, may be the most overlooked.

In music, motifs – or themes – often return throughout a composition. A melody introduced early in a piece reappears later, creating familiarity and emotional depth. Because the listener recognizes it, the music carries greater meaning.



Relationships work the same way.

Amplification happens when you revisit something that matters. You remember a challenge someone mentioned weeks ago. You follow up on an important goal. You acknowledge a contribution publicly. You connect a future conversation to something previously shared.

These moments communicate a powerful message: “I heard you, and I remembered.”

For many people, that simple act is surprisingly rare. And its impact is immense.

Influence Is An Experience

The meetings and events profession has always been about creating memorable experiences. We do it every day for attendees, clients, sponsors, and stakeholders. Yet some of the most meaningful experiences we create aren't found in a ballroom or on a stage.

They're found in ordinary conversations.

The professionals who build the strongest client relationships, lead the most engaged teams, and create the greatest influence often aren't the loudest voices in the room. They're the people who make others feel valued.

They lead with curiosity. They listen with attunement. They respond with resonance. And they strengthen relationships through amplification.

Because influence isn't simply about what you know. It's about how people experience you. And every conversation is an opportunity to create an experience worth remembering.



MOLLY KETCHAM

KEYNOTE SPEAKER, WORKSHOP TRAINER, AND
THE FOUNDER OF THE CURIOUS CONNECTOR CO.

Molly Ketcham is a keynote speaker, workshop facilitator, and founder of Curious Connector Co., where she helps leaders and teams strengthen communication, influence, and authentic human connection. Creator of the CARA Code framework focused on Curiosity, Attunement, Resonance, and Amplification, Molly blends psychology, strategy, and interactive learning to help organizations build stronger relationships and more impactful conversations. She has worked with organizations including Caesars Entertainment, Sherwin-Williams, and teams across the meetings and events industry to inspire meaningful collaboration and professional growth.

LEGION OF HONOR



NAVIGATE OHIO



The MPI Ohio Chapter was proud to celebrate the members of our distinguished Legion of Honor during Navigate. These members have dedicated fifteen years or more of service to strengthening our chapter, supporting fellow planners, and advancing the meetings and events industry across Ohio.

During the Legion of Honor Ceremony at the Navigate Lunch on February 23, attendees gathered to recognize the commitment, leadership, and lasting impact these individuals have made on our community. It was a privilege to honor and celebrate the following members of this exceptional circle:

Mark Bice
Barbara Burgie
Shawna Dunaway
Lillian Erickson
Jerry Forsting
David Freeman
Kathryne Gardette
Aaron Hayes
Beth Hecquet
Katie Jones
John Killacky

Alicia LeMasters
Dwight Loken
Ann Luketic
Don Miller
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Anna Ryan
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2026

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DATA IS YOUR DEFENSE



For years, event professionals have been asked to prove the value of their events with a surprisingly narrow set of metrics. Registration numbers, room block pickup, sponsorship revenue, and post-event surveys have long been the standard. While those metrics matter, they rarely tell the full story of the organizer's impact or the complexity of the decisions behind a successful event.

Attendee data is changing that, and not just for organizations. It is becoming one of the most valuable tools for reducing stress, minimizing risk, and helping planners gain greater recognition for the strategic role they already play.

One of the biggest challenges event organizers face is uncertainty. Will attendees engage with the content? Did the layout support networking? Were sponsors satisfied? Did the audience actually have a positive experience? Historically, planners had to rely heavily on instinct, anecdotal feedback, and fragmented survey responses. Richer attendee data creates a clearer picture of attendee behavior and sentiment, giving organizers confidence that their decisions are grounded in evidence rather than guesswork.

That shift matters personally and professionally. When planners can point to engagement trends, behavioral insights, dwell times, session popularity, or emotional response data, they are no longer defending decisions based on intuition alone. Data provides a shared language with leadership teams that ties event outcomes directly to organizational priorities such as member retention, revenue growth, education effectiveness, or community building.

It also expands how success is defined. A planner should not feel like an event failed simply because attendance dipped slightly in a difficult economic year. If attendee engagement increased, networking quality improved, or sponsors saw stronger interaction rates, those insights provide a more complete and fair evaluation of the organizer's work.

Perhaps most importantly, data can help event professionals advocate for themselves. Better insights make it easier to justify larger budgets, additional staff support, upgraded technology, or longer planning timelines. Leaders are far more likely to invest in event teams when they can clearly see the measurable impact behind the work.

The events industry does not have a measurement problem as much as it has a visibility problem. The more effectively organizers use attendee data, the easier it becomes for leadership to recognize the true strategic value of the people designing the experience.

For a deeper perspective on the leadership side of this conversation, read Nick Borelli's article, "The Leadership Problem That Events Cannot Measure Its Way Out Of" on Event Tech Live.



**NICK
BORELLI**

Nick Borelli is a digital marketing and live events strategist with over two decades of experience creating intentionally designed experiences that connect people and organizations. As founder of Borelli Strategies and through his work with

Allseated, he has helped develop campaigns, personas, organizing principles, and hybrid meeting solutions for global brands, while sharing his expertise through presentations, webinars, podcasts, and thought leadership on the future of meetings, marketing, and engagement.



NAVIGATE OHIO

SAVE



FEBRUARY 22 & 23
2027

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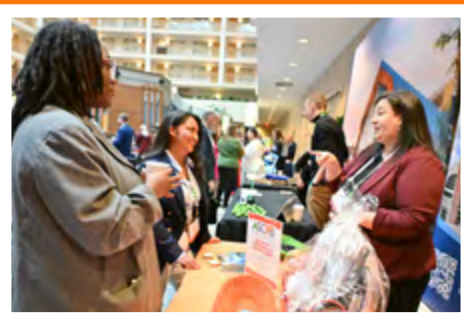
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HIGHLIGHTS FROM NAVIGATE

February 2026



Navigate 2026 brought the meetings and events industry together for two days of education, collaboration, and meaningful connection. Hosted by the MPI Ohio Chapter, the conference created space for planners, suppliers, and industry partners to exchange ideas, challenge perspectives, and focus on the future of the industry.

Held February 23 and 24 at the Embassy Suites by Hilton in Dublin, Ohio, the conference featured an agenda built around the realities event professionals are navigating today. Sessions explored topics ranging from emerging technology and AI to leadership, contracting strategy, communication, collaboration, and the growing need for resilience within the industry.

Featured speakers included Molly Ketcham, host and keynote speaker, and Chad J. Willett, speaker at the Elevate Awards, both bringing energy, insight, and fresh perspective to the event experience. They were joined by an accomplished lineup of industry leaders including Nick Borelli, who led the first planner-only session at Navigate, along with Melinda Huntley, Mark Bice, Laurie Sharp-Page, Adriane Cesa, and Lyndzi Barnes. Together, the speakers delivered practical strategies, honest conversations, and real-world experiences that attendees could immediately apply within their own organizations and events.

Beyond the education sessions, attendees connected during a late-night reception presented by Embassy Suites featuring games, exceptional food, and networking opportunities in a relaxed and engaging setting. Navigate 2026 also included a reverse trade show and a vibrant tabletop showcase highlighting destinations, venues, services, and experiences designed to spark conversation and strengthen partnerships between planners and suppliers.

Rather than focusing on trends for the sake of buzzwords, Navigate centered on practical growth, thoughtful leadership, and giving event professionals the tools and confidence to move the industry forward with clarity and purpose.



Thank you to our
2026 NAVIGATE SPONSORS!





ELEVATE 2026 AT NAVIGATE

A CELEBRATION OF OUR COMMUNITY

ELEVATE 2026 recognized and celebrated the individuals, organizations, and partnerships that made a lasting impact on MPI Ohio and the meetings and events industry. The annual awards program honored outstanding achievements, leadership, service, and dedication to the profession.



Thank you to our
2026 ELEVATE SPONSORS!





PLANNER OF THE YEAR

WINNER: ALICIA LEMASTERS, CMP

Alicia LeMasters, CMP, was recognized as MPI Ohio's Planner of the Year for her exceptional leadership, strategic approach to event management, and commitment to advancing the meetings profession. As her nominator noted, "Alicia demonstrates the qualities MPI Ohio seeks to honor: innovative thinking, consistent excellence, leadership through service, and meaningful contributions to the meetings and events industry," making a lasting impact through both her work and volunteer leadership.



SUPPLIER OF THE YEAR

WINNER: MIKE DETLING

Mike Detling received Supplier of the Year for his dedication to creating exceptional experiences and fostering meaningful connections within MPI Ohio. His nominator praised his commitment to collaboration and ability to create a welcoming, well-organized environment, noting that "Mike's commitment to collaboration and his ability to provide a welcoming, well-organized environment exemplify the values of our organization."



LEADERSHIP AWARD

WINNER: ABBEY BORDER

Abbey Border was honored with the Leadership Award for her ongoing dedication to MPI Ohio and her significant contributions to Navigate and other chapter initiatives. As her nominator shared, "She has been instrumental in the planning of the annual Navigate conference and continues to raise the bar each year."



RISING STAR AWARD

WINNER: GRACELYN RUBIO

Gracelyn Rubio earned the Rising Star Award for her growing involvement with MPI Ohio and contributions to the Membership Committee. Her nominator noted that "her fresh perspective on the industry is invaluable," helping bring new ideas and energy to the chapter.



VENUE OF THE YEAR

WINNER: CHAUTAUQUA HARBOR HOTEL - CELORON, NY



CHRISTY SELBY LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

WINNER: GREG DICKERSON

The Christy Selby Lifetime Achievement Award recognizes individuals whose lasting contributions have strengthened both MPI Ohio and the meetings and events industry. The 2026 recipient, Greg Dickerson, was honored for his dedication to developing the next generation of industry professionals. Through his work at Bowling Green State University, Greg has helped introduce countless students to MPI, creating opportunities for them to attend Navigate, connect with industry leaders, and explore careers in meetings and events. As one nominator shared, "His efforts in ensuring that students attend the annual Navigate conference, connect with members, and attend local chapter meetings are admirable."

CINCINNATI CHAPTER MEETING

The Evolving Meetings Landscape: Strategies for Success



MPI Ohio recently gathered at the Graduate Cincinnati on May 20th, 2026 for an engaging discussion, “The Evolving Meetings Landscape: Strategies for Success.” The panel featured perspectives from a meeting planner, industry supplier, and destination representative, providing a well-rounded look at current trends shaping the meetings industry. Key topics included the rise of late registration as the new normal, the challenges and strategies surrounding food and beverage planning for last-minute attendees, and the growing impact of artificial intelligence on event management. While the conversation highlighted several industry shifts, the strongest takeaway was the continued importance of building and maintaining relationships. Panelists emphasized that strong partnerships and trusted connections remain essential to navigating change and achieving long-term success in the meetings industry.



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CLEVELAND CHAPTER MEETING

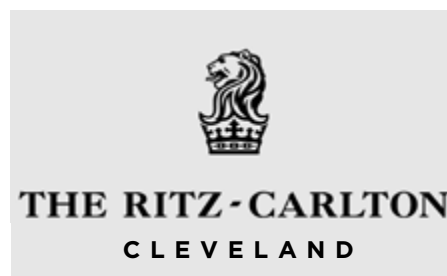
Homefield Advantage... Event Strategy Insights from Cleveland's Professional Sports Leaders

The April Chapter Meeting featured a dynamic panel discussion focused on the role of event planning within the sports industry. Representatives from the Cleveland Guardians, Cleveland Cavaliers, and Cleveland Sports Commission shared insights into planning and executing events of all sizes—from game-day experiences to large-scale sporting events and community activations. Panelists discussed logistics, stakeholder collaboration, attendee engagement, and the evolving expectations of event participants. The conversation provided MPI Ohio members with valuable takeaways and a behind-the-scenes look at the strategies and partnerships that contribute to successful sports-related events throughout Northeast Ohio.





**THANK YOU
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GLOBAL MEETINGS

INDUSTRY DAY (GMID)



MPI Ohio Chapter celebrated Global Meetings Industry Day (GMID) on May 6, 2026, with events in Cleveland, Columbus, and Cincinnati. Hosted at Metropolitan at The 9, Hotel LeVeque, and Moxy Cincinnati Downtown, respectively, the gatherings brought together meeting and event professionals to connect, collaborate, and celebrate the impact the meetings industry has on businesses, communities, and local economies across Ohio.





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● MARK YOUR CALENDAR.



JULY 22 2026

**Maximize Your
Membership Webinar**
ZOOM

JULY 28 2026

**Sip & Saunter
Networking Event**
*Cincinnati, Cleveland
& Columbus OH*

September 11 2026

**MPI Ohio & OSAP
Joint Industry Event**
*Hilton Columbus at Easton
Columbus OH*

OCTOBER 21 2026

**Planner Exclusive
Luncheon**
Columbus OH

FEBRUARY 22 & 23 2027

Navigate Conference
*The Ohioan
Lewis Center OH*

**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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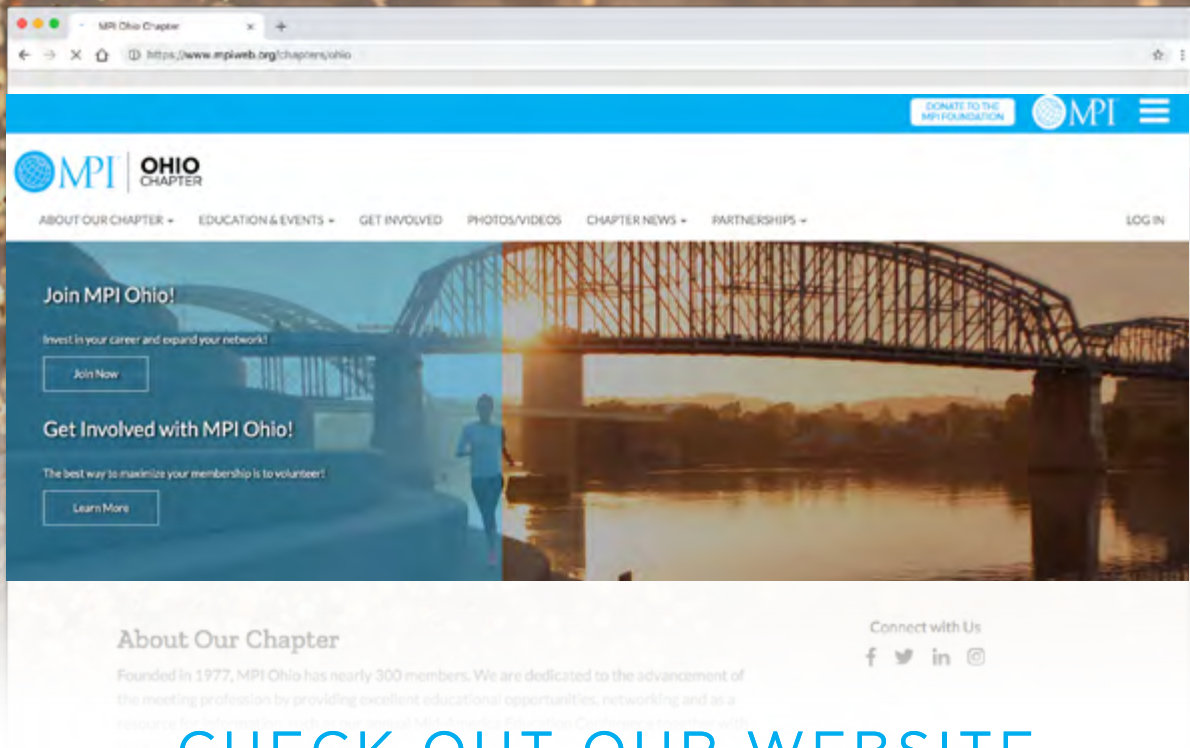
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They say learn something new everyday. There is no easier way than participating in our LinkedIn group at “**MPI Ohio Chapter.**”

You may even teach your peers a thing or two!



To stay in the loop, be sure to follow us at “**MPI Ohio Chapter**”



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