



## PROGRAM

The National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) &  
The Development District Association of Appalachia (DDAA)

### 2026 Washington Conference

March 8-11, 2026

The Crystal Gateway Marriott

1700 Richmond Highway, Arlington Virginia

### Sunday, March 8, 2026

*NOTE: NADO and DDAA board members and advisory committee members are asked to participate in pre-conference meetings throughout the day on Sunday, March 8. All conference attendees are encouraged to attend the **opening reception** on Sunday evening beginning at 5:30 p.m. ET. DDAA members are invited to attend the DDAA Dinner Banquet that follows at 6:30 p.m. ET.*

**10:00 a.m.-5:30 p.m.**

Registration – All attendees

Arlington Registration

**10:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m.**

NADO Research Foundation Advisory Committee Meeting –

NADO Research Foundation Advisory Committee members

Crystal Boardroom

**12:00-2:00 p.m.**

NADO Executive Committee Meeting and Luncheon –

NADO Executive Committee members

Crystal Boardroom

**1:00-3:00 p.m.**

DDAA Board of Directors Meeting – DDAA Board of Directors

Pentagon A

**3:30-5:30 p.m.**

NADO Board of Directors Meeting – NADO Board of Directors

Salons 5-6

**5:30-6:30 p.m.**

**Opening Reception** – *All attendees*

*Arlington Foyer*

**6:30-8:00 p.m.**

**DDAA Dinner Banquet** – *DDAA members*

*Salons 3-4*

# Monday, March 9, 2026

*NOTE: Concurrent breakout sessions on Monday are open to all participants, including both NADO and DDAA members. The “NADO track,” “DDAA track,” and “Joint track” labels denote which attendees may find the session content most relevant, but all attendees are welcome.*

## 7:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m.

Registration – All attendees

Arlington Registration

## 7:45-9:00 a.m.

DDAA Breakfast and Annual Business Meeting – DDAA members

Salons 1-2

## 9:15-10:30 a.m.

Opening Plenary Session – All attendees

Salons 3-4

### Inside the Agencies: Federal Initiatives, Funding, and Strategic Directions

During this opening session, key officials from a variety of federal agencies will provide updates on key federal initiatives, available funding opportunities, evolving federal priorities, and current programs and approaches.

#### Speakers:

- **Bryan Horn**, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Grant Programs, Office of Community Planning and Development, Department of Housing and Urban Development (*Tentatively Confirmed*)
- **Marek Laco**, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Employment and Training Administration, Department of Labor (*Tentatively Confirmed*)
- **Neal Robbins**, Deputy Under Secretary for Rural Development, Department of Agriculture
- **Loren Smith**, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy, Department of Transportation
- **Ben Page**, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Economic Development Administration, Department of Commerce

#### Moderator:

- **Matthew Dolge**, Piedmont Triad Regional Council | NADO President

#### Remarks:

- **Dennis Stripling**, West Alabama Regional Commission | DDAA President

## 10:45 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

### Concurrent Breakout Sessions (A, B, C, D)

*Breakout (A): NADO track*

Salon 1

### Rethinking Disaster Response and Mitigation: Policy Shifts and Reform Efforts

Federal disaster policy is evolving as agencies and Congress seek to modernize disaster response, recovery, and mitigation frameworks. During this session, panelists will discuss the administration’s approach to resilience; pending reform bills; and opportunities for regional collaboration. Panelists will discuss how changes in federal coordination and funding could impact local recovery timelines and highlight best practices for integrating economic resilience into disaster planning and response.

#### Speakers:

- **Brett Mattson**, Legislative Director, Justice and Public Safety, National Association of Counties
- **Stan Gimont**, Senior Advisor for Community Recovery, Hagerty Consulting

- **Julie Seger**, Federal Policy & Government Relations Director, American Flood Coalition

**Moderator:**

- **Kevin Belanger**, Chief Executive Officer, South Central Planning and Development Commission

*Breakout (B): NADO track*

*Salon 2*

**The Future of Federal Workforce Policy: Executive Actions and Congressional Directions**

Federal workforce development policy is evolving rapidly through new Executive Orders, the National Workforce Strategy, and the pending Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act reauthorization. This discussion will examine how these efforts shape regional systems, local employer engagement, and talent pipelines. Panelists will discuss the latest federal developments and approaches for navigating administrative changes that impact training, labor, and economic development programs.

**Speakers:**

- **James Hermes**, Associate Vice President, Government Relations, American Association of Community Colleges
- **Megan Evans**, Senior Government Relations Manager, National Skills Coalition
- **Taylor Maag**, Director of Workforce Policy, Jobs for the Future
- **Steve Voytek**, Senior Advisor, Foresight Law+Policy

**Moderator:**

- **Lori Sokol**, Executive Director, East Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission

*Breakout (C): DDAA track*

*Salon 5*

**Town & Gown: Building Community Leaders and Capacity with Higher Education Partnerships**

Across Appalachia, partnerships between Local Development Districts, technical schools, community colleges, and universities are transforming local economies and leadership pipelines. This panel brings together five recent Appalachian Leadership Institute (ALI) graduates from Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, West Virginia, and New York to share replicable models for building community leaders and capacity through cross-sector collaboration.

**Speakers:**

- **Lottie Ryans**, Director of Workforce & Literacy Initiatives, First Tennessee Development District
- **Fileve Tlaloc Palmer**, Regional Development Specialist, Southern Tier West Regional Planning & Development Board
- **Mavery Davis**, Director of Lending, New Economy Works WV
- **Cortney Burgess**, Site Director, Upstate Fatherhood Coalition

**Moderator:**

- **Kendy Alvarez**, Mayor, Borough of Lewisburg

*Breakout (D): Joint track*

*Salon 6*

**Unlocking Regional Potential: A Federal Lens for Rural Development**

Federal policy is poised to play a defining role in the future of rural economic development. From upcoming legislative initiatives to agency priorities, decisions being made by DC-based policymakers are driving investments in broadband, energy, workforce development, and infrastructure. This session will examine key policy developments, legislative timelines, and agency actions that regional development organizations should watch—and how to align local strategies to capture emerging federal opportunities in rural communities.

**Speakers:**

- **Owen Hart**, Legislative Director, Agriculture & Rural Affairs, National Association of Counties
- **Kelly Humrichouser**, Director of Government Relations, Main Street America

- **Aaliyah Nedd**, Director of Government Relations, National Cooperative Business Association

**Moderator:**

- **Robert Venables**, Executive Director, Southeast Conference | NADO Second Vice President

**12:15-1:45 p.m.** | *Award Presentation 12:30-12:45 p.m.*

**Plenary Luncheon – All attendees**

*Salons 3-4*

**The Evolving Federal Landscape: Program Management in a Complex Environment**

This panel discussion will explore how the evolving federal landscape—particularly within the Executive Branch—shapes regional and local development. As regulatory priorities shift, agencies restructure, and federal programs adapt to new mandates, organizations are confronted with both complexity and opportunity. Through real-time examples of regulatory and administrative change, this discussion will unpack the implications of federal volatility and provide participants with practical tools to help them anticipate and respond to emerging policies, effectively manage evolving compliance demands, and advocate for program stability and continuity in the face of shifting agency agendas.

**Speakers:**

- **Charles Cooper**, Managing Partner & Founder, Brumidi Group
- **Jim Kolb**, Partner, Summit Strategies
- **Mark Ritacco**, Senior Advisor, Government Advocacy & Contracting, Manatt, Phelps & Phillips, LLP

**Moderator:**

- **Melissa Kraemer Badtke**, Executive Director, East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission | NADO Secretary

**2:00-3:15 p.m.**

**Concurrent Breakout Sessions (A, B, C, D)**

*Breakout (A): NADO track – Transportation*

*Salon 1*

**Connecting Rural and Small Town America: What’s Next for Transportation Policy**

As Congress prepares for the reauthorization of the surface transportation bill, what does the future hold for rural and regional infrastructure investment? This session will explore emerging priorities in transportation policy and how they intersect with regional economic goals. Panelists will discuss funding outlooks, policy shifts, and opportunities for Regional Development Organizations to advocate for stronger rural inclusion in federal transportation programs.

**Speakers:**

- **Leeann Sinpatansakul**, Director of Policy, National Association of Regional Councils
- **Ben Gilsdorf**, Associate Legislative Director, Transportation, National Association of Counties
- **Katie Economou**, Legislative Director, Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations
- **Brittany Kohler**, Legislative Director, Transportation and Infrastructure, National League of Cities

**Moderator:**

- **Kevin Adam**, Transportation Consultant, NADO

*Breakout (B): NADO track*

*Salon 2*

**Leveraging Data for Local Impact**

From data dashboards to machine learning algorithms, accounting to AI, data is driving more and more of our conversations and rapidly transforming the intersection of policy, data governance, and impact. This session will explore the evolving data landscape and highlight how your organization can leverage data to track progress and navigate projects and programs.

**Speakers:**

- **Alison Peoples**, Senior Economic Development Researcher, Argonne National Laboratory
- **Iain Hyde**, Emergency Management and Economic Security Department Manager, Argonne National Laboratory

**Moderator:**

- **Brett Schwartz**, Associate Director, NADO Research Foundation

*Breakout (C): DDAA track*

*Salon 5*

**Scaling Strategic Planning with AI to Cultivate Stronger, Smarter Communities**

How do Local Development Districts navigate constant change while cultivating regional strength? This session explores how one LDD partnered with a technology firm to scale inclusive community input, distill strategic priorities, and help regional local organizations to build effective strategic plans — all without inflating their budget.

**Speakers:**

- **Kurt Bauman**, VP of Economic and Community Development, NEPA Alliance
- **Mike Burns**, CEO, StratSimple

**Moderator:**

- **Tyler Day**, Manager of Economic and Community Development, NEPA Alliance

*Breakout (D): Joint Track*

*Salon 6*

**Housing at the Crossroads: Affordability, Supply, and Regional Solutions**

Communities across the country are facing housing shortages that threaten economic growth and workforce retention. This session examines the federal and regional policy landscape surrounding housing supply, affordability, and development tools. Panelists will discuss creative financing mechanisms, public-private partnerships, and regional approaches that link housing to workforce and infrastructure planning—offering insight into how development organizations can drive innovative, scalable housing solutions.

**Speakers:**

- **Andy Winkler**, Managing Director, Housing & Infrastructure, Bipartisan Policy Center
- **Vicki Watson**, Executive Director, National Community Development Association
- **Jonathan Harwitz**, Director of Public Policy, Housing Assistance Council

**Moderator:**

- **Rick Hunsaker**, Executive Director, Region XII Council of Government | NADO Immediate Past President

**3:30-4:30 p.m.**

**NADO Regional Chapter Meetings - NADO and DDAA members**

*Central Meeting*

*Salon 1*

*East Meeting*

*Crystal Boardroom*

*Midwest Meeting*

*Salon 5*

*Southeast Meeting*

*Salon 2*

*Southwest Meeting*

*Salon 6*

*West Meeting*

*Pentagon B*

**4:30-6:00 p.m.**

**Networking Reception – All attendees**

*Salon 3-4*

# Tuesday, March 10, 2026

*NOTE: NADO member attendees are encouraged to participate in meetings on Capitol Hill on Tuesday, March 10. For those attendees who do not plan to attend Hill meetings, additional conference content is offered at the conference venue throughout the day.*

## **8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.**

**Registration - All attendees**

*Arlington Registration*

## **9:00-10:15 a.m.**

**Plenary Session – All attendees**

*Salons 3-4*

For more than three decades, Charlie Cook has been delivering independent, non-partisan political analysis as the founder of The Cook Political Report – deemed by The New York Times as “a newsletter that both parties regard as authoritative.” In this talk, Cook discusses today’s political and legislative environments in a balanced way, providing insights into the latest from Washington, the interplay between Congressional Democrats and Republicans, as well as an expert outlook on current events.

**Speaker:**

- **Charlie Cook**, Founder, Cook Political Report

**Moderator:**

- **Russell Devorsky**, Executive Director, Heart of Texas Council of Governments | NADO Treasurer

## **10:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m.**

**Capitol Hill Meetings** (on your own) - *NADO track*

*NOTE: Attendees are encouraged to spend this open block of time on Capitol Hill educating your members of Congress about your work. Hill meetings are self-directed. If you need help securing contact information for Hill staffers and schedulers, please contact Juliette Wilder at [jwilder@nado.org](mailto:jwilder@nado.org).*

## **10:30-11:45 a.m.**

**Breakout Session**

*Salon 5*

*Breakout: DDAA track*

### **Natural Assets + Cultural Assets = Creative Placemaking**

Quality of life can be a very important factor for residents when choosing where to live or for businesses when selecting a new site. One important way this can be improved is by creating a great sense of place. Investments in natural and cultural assets can reinvigorate downtowns, create new tourism opportunities, invite outside investment, and strengthen communities. This session will show examples of investments being made by communities within the Georgia Mountains Region, and how investing in your community's natural and cultural assets can create the potential for a stronger community where residents will want to live, tourists will want to come visit, and in which businesses will want to invest.

**Speakers:**

- **Patrick Larson**, Economic Development Director, Georgia Mountains Regional Commission

## **11:45 a.m.-1:15 p.m.**

**Lunch on your own**

**1:30-2:45 p.m.**

**Breakout Session**

*Salon 5*

*Breakout: DDAA track*

**Advancing Economic Development through Hydroponic Agriculture in Appalachia**

How can agribusiness serve as a catalyst for private investment, job creation, and infrastructure development in economically distressed communities? This session will feature the recent announcement of a major investment by Little Leaf Farms, a hydroponic agriculture company, which is establishing operations in Manchester, Tennessee. The session will explore the broader benefits of hydroponic agriculture in rural Appalachian communities, including job creation, entrepreneurialism, sustainable food production, and regional economic resiliency - and how public-private partnerships and targeted infrastructure investments can drive transformative change in Appalachia.

**Speakers:**

- **Anne Hosea-Majors**, Executive Director, Industrial Board of Coffee County
- **Brooxie Carlton**, Asst. Commissioner of Rural and Community Development, Tennessee Department of Economic & Community Development

**Moderator:**

- **Lorie Fisher**, Economic & Community Development Director, South Central TN Development District

**4:30-6:00 p.m.**

**Reception - All attendees**

*Skyview*

# Wednesday, March 11, 2026

*NOTE: Conference content for the NADO & DDAA joint conference concludes at 11:00 a.m. on Wednesday, March 11. Following the conference, there is a special post-conference training for the Economic Development District (EDD) Community of Practice (CoP). This post-conference training session is free, but separate registration is required.*

## **8:00-10:00 a.m.**

**Registration** – All attendees

*Arlington Registration*

## **8:00-9:45 a.m.**

**Plenary Breakfast** – All attendees

*Salon 4*

### **Beyond the Beltway: Securing Philanthropic Investments for Rural America**

Amidst federal funding uncertainty, this panel discussion will provide insight into how regional stakeholders can diversify their funding streams by engaging with philanthropic partners. During this session, attendees will hear directly from philanthropic organizations currently investing in regional priorities, and gain insight into what key criteria philanthropic entities use when evaluating potential partners. Panelists will provide practical strategies for how rural stakeholders can build capacity, cultivate authentic relationships, and effectively attract and leverage philanthropic capital to ensure the long-term sustainability and success of their community and economic development work.

#### **Speakers:**

- **Charlie Glover**, President and CEO, TLL Temple Foundation
- **Jessica Wirgau**, Chief Executive Officer, Community Foundation of the New River Valley
- **Debbie Chou**, Principal, Growth Portfolio, Roberts Enterprise Development Fund

#### **Moderator:**

- **Kevin Byrd**, Executive Director, New River Valley Regional Commission | NADO Past President

## **10:00-11:00 a.m.**

**Closing Plenary Session** – All attendees

*Salon 4*

### **Building the Future: The 21st-Century Blueprint for Rural Economic Resilience**

This session will provide a high-level overview of the rural technology sector ecosystem – what’s working, where gaps remain, and how communities can build capacity. Panelists will share best practices, spotlight successful local models, and outline policy approaches that strengthen entrepreneurship, workforce development, and long-term economic resiliency in rural regions.

#### **Speakers:**

- **Amanda Weinstein**, Director of Research, Knowledge and Evaluation, Center on Rural Innovation
- **Kenan Fikri**, Senior Fellow, Economic Innovation Group
- **Mark Muro**, Senior Fellow, Brookings Metro
- **Jessica Breaux**, Senior Manager, Economic Development, Amazon

#### **Moderator:**

- **Charlie Baker**, Executive Director, Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission | NADO First Vice President

## **11:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.**

**An Afternoon with the Districts**

*Salons 5-6*

*Post-conference training. Separate registration required.*