

**DRAFT**

**MEDA 2026 Annual Conference**

**April 26-28, 2026**

***Theme: The A-MAZE-ing World of Economic Development:  
Navigating Complexity. Embracing Innovation. Driving Impact***

Economic development can feel like a maze—full of turns, detours, and emerging pathways. From new tools like AI to evolving expectations around housing, workforce, and quality of place, the work is increasingly complex. But within the maze lies opportunity. MEDA's 2026 Annual Conference will guide practitioners through the intersections of strategy, technology, community, and industry, helping them chart a smarter, more impactful course. It's not just a maze—it's A-MAZING work.

**Sunday, April 26, 2026**

**10:30 AM – 3:00 PM    DISPLAY TABLE SET UP**

**Location:** Foyer outside Chesapeake Ballroom

**1:00 – 4:00 PM        MAIN STREET TOUR:**

**Location:** Rock Hall Main Street

Meet at Rock Hall Main Street; pre-registration required

**Sponsored by:** Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development

Discover the charm of Rock Hall, a quaint fishing village on the shores of the Chesapeake Bay that is home to 1,200 residents and more than 1,400 boat slips. Known as a popular tourist destination, Rock Hall hosts year-round festivals that celebrate its unique heritage and environment. MEDA visitors will enjoy a brief guided shuttle tour offering a glimpse of the town's waterfront businesses, working harbor, and sweeping Chesapeake Bay views. The experience continues with a walking tour along Main Street, where participants will explore community art projects, browse local shops, and sample regional foods and beverages. Rock Hall is proud to showcase the transformative impact of Maryland DHCD investments. Funding through Project Restore, the Main Street Improvement, and State Revitalization Programs has helped make Main Street Rock Hall a thriving hub.

**11:45 AM – 4:30 PM    MEDA ANNUAL GOLF TOURNAMENT – shotgun start at 11:45 AM**

**Location:** River Marsh Golf Club

**Sponsored by:** Baltimore Gas and Electric

**4:00 PM                HOTEL CHECK-IN BEGINS**

**4:00 PM                CONFERENCE REGISTRATION OPENS**

**Location:** Foyer outside Chesapeake Ballroom

**5:30 - 6:30 PM**            **WELCOME EARLY BIRD RECEPTION**  
Celebrate and welcome the members who have joined in the past year. All registrants have an opportunity to mix and mingle with new members, the MEDA Board of Directors, conference speakers, and sponsors. Open to all conference registrants!

**6:30 – 8:30 PM**            **WELCOME TO THE EASTERN SHORE NETWORKING DINNER**  
**Welcome:** Senator Johnny Mautz

**8:30 – 10:00 PM**            **Sunday Night Networking Activities**

**Monday, April 27, 2026**

**8:00 – 8:30 AM**            **OPENING BREAKFAST**  
**Sponsored by:** Dorchester County Economic Development

**8:30 – 9:00 AM**            **MEDA MEMBERSHIP BUSINESS MEETING**  
**Year in Review:** Tammi Thomas, MEDA Board President  
**Approval of Minutes:** Allison Akers, Secretary  
**Treasurer’s Report:** Renée Winsky, Treasurer  
**Membership Report:** Matt Miller/Ebony Stocks, CECD, Membership Co-Chairs  
**Election of Officers:**

**9:00 – 10:00 AM**            **OPENING KEYNOTE - Driving Impact**  
We kick off the conference with a bold conversation about what it truly means to drive impact in today’s economic development landscape. Whether through breakthrough technologies, transformative redevelopment, or catalytic investment, this keynote will challenge attendees to think bigger about how strategy, leadership, and execution converge to create measurable results. Expect insight, inspiration, and a clear call to action for communities ready to lead.

**10:00 – 10:30 AM**            **BREAK**

**10:30 – 11:30 AM**            **BREAKOUT SESSIONS**  
Economic development is never just about projects—it’s about people. This breakout series centers on the real-world challenges and opportunities shaping our communities, with a focus on workforce mobility, housing access, military alignment, and long-term economic resilience. These sessions will explore how leaders are removing barriers, strengthening talent pipelines, and building economies that truly work for the people who power them.

- Panel 1: Workforce Mobility & Access: Child care. Transportation. Housing. Funding gaps. Workforce mobility remains one of the most pressing challenges facing communities today. This panel will examine the interconnected systems that determine whether talent can access opportunity—and what economic developers can do to close the gaps.
- Panel 2: Featuring representatives from regional military alliances, this discussion will explore the economic impact of defense assets and the strategies states are using to diversify beyond federal reliance. Learn how proactive planning and cross-sector coordination can strengthen resilience while protecting critical economic drivers.
- Panel 3: Housing is no longer a side conversation—it is core economic infrastructure. This session will highlight innovative approaches to expanding housing supply and building the workforce pipeline to support it.

**11:30 – 11:45 AM**            **BREAK**

**11:45 – 1:15 PM            LUNCHEON AND SECRETARIES DISCUSSION**

Join us for a dynamic and timely discussion with Maryland’s Cabinet Secretaries as they share priorities, policy direction, and opportunities shaping the state’s economic future. This engaging lunchtime conversation will offer direct insight into how state leadership is aligning resources, advancing innovation, and partnering with local communities to drive impact across Maryland.

**Moderator:**

**Panelists:**

- Deputy Secretary Steve Connelly, Maryland Department of Agriculture
- Secretary Harry Coker, Maryland Department of Commerce
- Deputy Secretary Julia Glanz, Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development
- Secretary Rebecca Flora, Maryland Department of Planning
- Acting Secretary Walter Simmons, Maryland Department of Social and Economic Mobility
- Secretary Serena McIlwain, Maryland Department of the Environment
- Acting Secretary Kathryn Thomson, Maryland Department of Transportation
- Secretary Portia Wu, Maryland Department of Labor

**1:15 - 1:30 PM            BREAK**

**1:30 - 2:30                SESSION: Embracing Innovation**

Four fast-paced presentations spotlighting industry sectors that are actively embracing innovation to stay competitive and drive growth. Hear directly from leaders who are leveraging new technologies, rethinking business models, and positioning their sectors for long-term impact.

**2:30 – 3:45 PM            Economic Outlook**  
**Speaker:** Anirban Basu, PhD, Sage Policy Group  
**Sponsored by:** MEDCO

Anirban Basu is Chairman & CEO of Sage Policy Group, Inc., a Baltimore-based economic and policy consultancy he founded in 2004. He serves the Chief Economist function for many organizations, including the Maryland Bankers Association and Associated Builders and Contractors. The Baltimore Business Journal named him one of the region’s 20 most powerful business leaders in 2010. In 2022, he entered the Daily Record newspaper’s Circle of Influence. He is the Distinguished Economist in Residence at Goucher College, where he teaches History of Economic Thought. He holds four graduate degrees, including a J.D. and a Ph.D.

**3:45 – 5:30 PM            BREAK**  
Network with fellow attendees and visit the display table vendors.

**4:00-5:00 PM            OPTIONAL Session**  
Designed as an interactive, professional-development–focused experience, this optional deep dive session creates space for rising professionals to sharpen skills, expand perspective, and build confidence in their economic development careers. This lab will focus on practical tools, peer exchange, and real-world leadership scenarios tailored for early- and mid-career practitioners.

**5:30 – 6:15 PM            BANQUET RECEPTION**  
**Location:** Foyer outside Chesapeake Ballroom

**6:15 - 8:00 PM            MEDA BANQUET**  
**Location:** Chesapeake Ballroom  
**Welcome Remarks by:** Tammi Thomas, MEDA Board President

**8:00 – 9:00 PM**

**MEDA AWARDS CEREMONY**

**Location:** Chesapeake Ballroom

**Sponsored by:** Miles & Stockbridge P.C.

**Awards Presented by:** Chris Sennett, Principal, Miles & Stockbridge

**Individual Awards Presented by:** Dawn Medley & Lorin Hinton, MEDA Awards Committee

**Co-Chairs:** Martin Proulx, 2025 Rising Star

Tonight's awards ceremony will honor standouts in the field of economic development and the professionals who foster MEDA's success today. Recognizing the 2026 MEDA Award winners.

**9:00 - 9:30 PM**

**Awards Celebration Reception - SILENT AUCTION ENDS at 9:30 PM**

**Tuesday, April 28, 2026**

**8:30 – 9:30 AM**

**BREAKFAST & OPENING KEYNOTE:** Navigating Challenges

**Speaker:** Nathan Ohle, President/CEO, International Economic Development Council (IEDC)

In this powerful closing keynote, Nathan Ohle will explore how economic developers can lead through uncertainty with confidence, strategy, and purpose. Drawing from national insights and on-the-ground experience, Nathan will unpack the real challenges facing communities today—from workforce disruption and housing pressures to shifting federal priorities—and offer a clear framework for turning complexity into coordinated action.

**9:30 – 9:45 AM**

**BREAK**

**9:45 – 10:45 AM**

**SESSION: Navigating Challenges**

Four high-impact talks centered on turning barriers into breakthroughs. From resilience planning to ecosystem alignment, these presenters will showcase bold solutions that are helping communities navigate complexity with clarity and confidence.

**10:45 – 11:45 AM**

**CLOSING SESSION**

We'll bring it all together in an interactive fishbowl session designed to move from inspiration to integration. As leaders step into the circle to reflect on what resonated most, a live artist will weave the themes into a final visual map—turning conversation into a lasting roadmap for action.

**11:45 AM - 12:00 PM**

**CLOSING REMARKS & DRAWING**

**Speakers:** Tammi Thomas, MEDA Board President

“This event is recognized by the International Economic Development Council (IEDC) as a professional development event that counts toward the recertification of Certified Economic Developers (CEcD).”



INTERNATIONAL  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
COUNCIL