



The Strategic Power of Community: A Roadmap for Veterinary Association Leaders

Virtual

April 14-15 2026

1:00 – 5:30 PM Eastern



**VETERINARY
MEDICAL
ASSOCIATION**
EXECUTIVES

VMAE | ThinkWORKS
Registration Brochure



Program Overview

Veterinary associations play a critical role in offering high-quality and credible expert learning opportunities that contribute to the profession's long-term competitiveness and adaptability.

At ThinkWORKS 2026, we'll dive into the strategic value of "community" by presenting a roadmap to help VMA executives explore:

- Where you are today;
- What capabilities or gaps define your current stage; and
- What it looks like to advance toward higher-impact community practices.

The workshop will demonstrate how associations can leverage community to:

- Strengthen competitive advantage;
- Increase member engagement and loyalty;
- Improve organizational and member performance outcomes; and
- Expand value propositions across the member lifecycle.

These principles can be applied across the board to events (in-person and virtual), learning programs (formal and informal), membership, advocacy, professional development, and any other functions that naturally support or can be repurposed to support community building.

On the second day, we'll explore where veterinary medicine is heading and how VMAs can play a leading role by equipping members with the insight, education, and confidence needed to thrive in a rapidly changing profession.

ThinkWORKS 2026 will also feature:

- **Collaborative Innovation:** Association Executive Think Tank is a unique opportunity to share your successes, swap tools, and brainstorm solutions. This interactive session will cover key issues you identify in advance.
- **Social Event:** Sweet Connections: A ThinkWORKS Chocolate Social hour offers a relaxed opportunity to unwind and connect with peers while enjoying a guided chocolate tasting experience together.

Register by March 30, to ensure you receive your chocolate tasting kit in time for the social event. Don't miss this opportunity to enjoy the full experience and connect with fellow attendees during our guided chocolate tasting.



Schedule

Tuesday, April 14

All times listed are Eastern

1:00 - 1:15 PM	Welcome and Introductions
1:15 - 2:15 PM	The Strategic Power of Community: A Roadmap for Veterinary Association Leaders: Module 1—Understanding Community as a Strategic Asset John Nown, Business Strategist Build a shared understanding of what “Community” means in 2026+, why it matters, and how veterinary associations can use it to drive strategic value. In this module we’ll cover what community really means today, why community matters, the community maturity journey (Big Picture), and executive reflection: where is your association today?
2:15 - 3:15 PM	The Strategic Power of Community: A Roadmap for Veterinary Association Leaders: Module 2—Activating Community Across the Association Ecosystem John Nown, Business Strategist An exploration of how community can be embedded across core functions, regardless of starting point, and how current programs can be repurposed to strengthen community. The presentation will address making hidden assets visible, where community often breaks down, how to evolve existing programs into community-building engines, and case examples.
3:20 - 3:30 PM	Break
3:30 - 4:30 PM	The Strategic Power of Community: A Roadmap for Veterinary Association Leaders: Module 3—Scaling, Sustaining, and Leading Community at the Executive Level Community Journey Phase: Growth, Maturity & Impact John Nown, Business Strategist In this third and final module, our facilitator will share his leadership perspective, operating model, and investment priorities needed to advance your community strategy, including new revenue opportunities through community, measuring and communicating community impact, and action planning.
4:30 - 5:30 PM	Sweet Connections: A ThinkWORKS Chocolate Social Hour Unwind and connect with fellow attendees during this guided chocolate tasting experience. Led by an expert chocolatier, this interactive session invites you to sample a curated selection of chocolates while learning how to taste and appreciate their unique flavors and craftsmanship. It’s a relaxed and enjoyable way to spark conversation, strengthen connections, and share a memorable experience with colleagues across our community. Attendees who register by March 30 will receive a curated box of chocolates from Ethel M Chocolates. Be sure to list the address you would like your chocolates shipped to when you register. 

Schedule

Wednesday, April 15

All times listed are Eastern

1:00 - 1:15 PM	Introduction to Day 2
1:15 - 2:15 PM	Guiding the Profession Forward: The Strategic Role of Veterinary Associations in a Changing Market Dr. Ernie Ward, VetFamily US, VerticalVet, Co-Founder and Chief Veterinary Veterinary medicine is entering a period of structural change marked by declining visit volumes, rising consumer scrutiny, accelerating adoption of hybrid care, workforce strain, and unprecedented expectations for transparency. These forces are not isolated trends. Together, they redefine how trust is built, how value is communicated, and how veterinary professionals are supported. For veterinary associations, this moment creates both pressure and opportunity. Members are no longer looking only for advocacy or updates. They are looking for clarity, guidance, and practical tools to navigate regulations, technology, and evolving client expectations. Associations that help members explain the value of hybrid care models, adopt compliant hybrid care models, develop leaders, and prepare for transparency standards will become indispensable. Those that do not risk irrelevance. This session explores where veterinary medicine is heading and, more importantly, how associations can lead that transition by equipping members with the insight, education, and confidence needed to thrive in a rapidly changing profession.
2:15 - 3:15 PM	Trust at Machine Speed: Rebuilding the VMA Operating Model for the AI Era Dr. Adam Little, Veterinarian and Entrepreneur Veterinary medicine is entering a period where change is faster than the profession's traditional guidance cycles. As AI capabilities expand, veterinarians will look to VMAs for clearer, more frequent direction on what to adopt, what to ignore, and how to navigate new risks, workflows, and business models. At the same time, VMAs face unique pressure: rising member expectations, more complex issues to adjudicate, and limited staff capacity. This executive session focuses on the dual impact. First, how VMAs can use their reach and trust to become the profession's "signal layer" as information becomes abundant and uneven in quality. Second, how associations themselves will be run differently: automation of routine work, faster content and policy operations, personalized member services at scale, and a redesigned operating model that increases output without proportional headcount. The goal is to leave with a practical view of what changes first, where AI creates real leverage for VMAs, and what it means to rebuild an association that is structurally fit for speed.
3:15 - 3:30 PM	Break
3:30 - 4:45 PM	Association Executive Think Tank Back by popular demand! Heather O'Steen facilitates a MemberShare format which was very successful at the 2025 Fall Conference. We added extra time so attendees have sufficient time to collaborate in a dynamic environment, exchanging ideas and best practices. The facilitator asks participants several predetermined questions for all of us to get a pulse of what others are doing. This format provides an opportunity for members to share their various successes, tools, and strategies, while gaining actionable insights from peers. Whether you're looking for new tools, fresh perspectives, or solutions to challenges, you'll leave with practical takeaways and a stronger connection to the community.
4:45 - 5:00 PM	Open Floor and Wrap Up This is an opportunity to bring up emerging issues or developments we did not cover during the program but would be of interest to the membership, as well as future topics to be covered in future conferences.

Presenters

John Nawn



John Nawn is a business strategist who helps association leaders translate community from an abstract concept into a source of durable strategic advantage. He works with CEOs to position community as a core business system—essential to relevance, resilience, and long-term performance—not an engagement initiative. He brings a disciplined, executive-level perspective shaped by years of work at the intersection of strategy, organizational design, and leadership decision-making. In 2025, John authored a series of articles for the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE), exploring how associations can expand their role in members' professional development by building on traditional learning capabilities, adopting new ones, and positioning problem-solving as a core competency in order to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage.

Dr. Ernie Ward



Dr. Ernie Ward is an award-winning veterinarian, internationally recognized speaker, entrepreneur, author of several books and textbook chapters, columnist, and media personality. He is a co-founder and Chief Veterinary Officer of VetFamily US, overseeing VerticalVet and dvmGRO, group purchasing organizations (GPOs) with over 4,000 US members and 10,000 clinics worldwide.

A 1992 graduate of the University of Georgia College of Veterinary Medicine, Dr. Ward has been honored as Speaker of the Year at both the VMX and WVC conferences. He's the recipient of the 2018 Veterinary Journalist of the Year Award and the US National Veterinary Practice of Excellence Award, the 2026 Bright Minds Industry Influencer award, along with numerous other veterinary and civic recognitions. He serves on several influential boards, including as Chair of the World Small Animal Veterinary Association's (WSAVA) Strategic Advisory Committee and also serves on WSAVA's Financial Advisory Committee, the Morris Animal Foundation's Scientific and Animal Welfare Advisory Boards, the Grey Muzzle Organization, and the Catalyst Council.

Dr. Ward founded the Association for Pet Obesity Prevention (APOP) and the World Pet Obesity Association (WPOA) and is the editor of the upcoming textbook, *Veterinary Clinical Obesity: A Multidisciplinary Approach to Causes, Consequences, and Interventions*, to be published by Wiley. When he's not working with pets or writing, you'll find Dr. Ward surfing and training for endurance races, meditating, or sharing fresh ideas on his award-winning podcast, *Veterinary Viewfinder*, and in his monthly column, "Opening Shots," for *Today's Veterinary Business*.

Dr. Adam Little



Dr. Adam Little is a veterinarian and entrepreneur known for his innovative approaches to animal and human health. Educated at the University of Guelph with a BSc and DVM, he further distinguished himself as the first veterinarian to attend Singularity University, focusing on the intersection of technology and healthcare. His professional journey includes serving as the Director of Entrepreneurship and Innovation at Texas A&M College of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences. He co-founded GoFetch, which has delivered significant cost savings in pet care through its loyalty and subscription services. Dr. Little has also contributed to the veterinary field through his board memberships with Veterinarians Without Borders, the Ontario Veterinary Medical Association, and the Catalyst Council.



Scholarships

Thanks to the support provided by VMAE Strategic Initiative Partners, VMAE can offer two scholarships for VMAE | ThinkWORKS 2026. One scholarship is available to a VMAE member who would not otherwise be able to participate due to the association's limited operating budget. An additional scholarship is available for a new professional – a member who is new to VMAE and/or new to the veterinary medical association setting. Each scholarship waives the meeting registration fee.

To be considered for a scholarship, please write a brief (1-2 paragraph) explanation of your desire to participate in VMAE | ThinkWORKS 2026 (and your financial need, except in the case of new professionals). Email your information to Tesha Hoff at teshahoff@vmae.org by close of business on Friday, March 6, 2026. Scholarship applicants will be notified promptly thereafter.

FAQs

What technology will I need?

For optimal experience we recommend participating from a desktop or laptop computer with broadband wired/wireless access. You will be able to connect to audio via your computer or a telephone. A webcam is suggested for the interactive components of the sessions as well as for the social learning activities. Zoom will be the primary software.

What happens after I register?

Closer to the conference you'll receive a link that provides access to:

- Live conference sessions and resources
- Recordings of sessions and chat streams available for on-demand access after the conference

How do I get the most out of a virtual conference?

Treat a virtual conference as you would an in-person conference with respect to your calendar and task load. Prioritize the time to be truly present in the experience, engage with the sessions and presenters, and use the chat and other networking tools regularly to connect with other attendees. Minimize distractions – when you're watching alone it's easy to "multi-task" and get distracted. Instead, try to reduce notifications, grab a notepad, and get ready to start learning! Attending the live virtual conference has huge benefits like interacting with other attendees and having your questions answered directly by the speaker. In addition, you will have on-demand access to sessions after the conference, so don't you don't have to worry about missing a slide or forgetting what the presenter said, just rewind and rewatch!

What are the key benefits of attending this virtual conference?

- You still get all the amazing information and insights from speakers
- You still get the opportunity to engage with your colleagues and partners
- You reduce the time and financial commitments required to attend in-person events



Thank you to our Strategic Initiative Partners

whose contributions allow VMAE to deliver world-class education and resources that help VMA executives create thriving organizations and provide effective leadership within the veterinary profession.

TITANIUM



PLATINUM



GOLD



SILVER



BRONZE





Name: _____

Association: _____

Position: _____

Shipping Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Do you require assistance such as sign language interpretation or assistive listening device: _____

Do you have any dietary restrictions we need to be aware of? _____

REGISTRATION FEES

REGISTRATION INCREASES BY \$200 AFTER APRIL 1

☐ VMAE Member \$295

☐ VMAE Member Staff (non-member) \$395

☐ VMAE Strategic Initiative Partner*
Partners receive attendance opportunities
to based on sponsorship level

PAYMENT INFORMATION

☐ Visa ☐ MasterCard ☐ American Express

Credit card #: _____ Expiration date: _____

Cardholder's name printed: _____ CVV #: _____

Cardholder's signature: _____

Billing address : _____

City, State/Province, Postal Code: _____

HOW TO REGISTER

- ONLINE: www.vmae.org
- BY FAX: 866-628-4856

Cancellations received on or before April 1 will receive a full refund less a \$50 administrative fee.

No refunds will be issued for cancellations after April 1 or for no shows.

Register before April 1 AND SAVE \$200



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VMAE exists to help VMA executives create thriving organizations and provide effective leadership within the veterinary profession.