

VMAE Fall Conference

Smarter Together:
Strategic Innovation,
Regulatory Shifts, Tech Solutions,
and Executive Wellbeing

Lexington, Kentucky
October 22-25, 2026



**VETERINARY
MEDICAL
ASSOCIATION**
EXECUTIVES

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

U THURSDAY, OCTOBER 22

5:30 - 7:00 pm	Welcome Reception <i>Room: Magnolia, 1st floor</i>
7:30 - 9:00 pm	Optional Small Group Dinners <i>Various Lexington Restaurants</i>

U FRIDAY, OCTOBER 23

8:15 - 8:45 am	Continental Breakfast <i>Room: Magnolia, 1st floor</i>
8:45 am - Noon	CE Program <i>Room: Magnolia, 1st floor</i>
Noon - 1:00 pm	Lunch <i>Room: Grand Kentucky Ballroom Salon C&D, 2nd floor</i>
1:00 - 3:30 pm	CE Program <i>Room: Magnolia, 1st floor</i>
3:30 - 6:30 pm	Wellness/Free Time
6:30 - 9:30 pm	Group Dinner <i>Mane on Main</i>

U SATURDAY, OCTOBER 24

8:15 - 9:00 am	Breakfast <i>Room: Magnolia, 1st floor</i>
9:00 am - Noon	CE Program <i>Room: Magnolia, 1st floor</i>
12:45 - 6:00 pm	Keeneland Race Track/Lunch

U SUNDAY, OCTOBER 25

10:15 am - 5:00 pm	Optional Bourbon or Horse Country Tours
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Smarter Together

Strategic Innovation, Regulatory Shifts, Tech Solutions, and Executive Wellbeing

Veterinary association leaders face a rapidly shifting landscape, where balancing high-level strategy, complex policy, and daily operations can easily lead to executive burnout. This comprehensive program equips executives with the tools and insights needed to navigate these multi-faceted challenges head-on.

We are excited to have Mary Byers, CAE, one of the most iconic and respected voices in the association management field, lead Friday's program with a focus on practical innovation and smart strategies for moving associations forward.

From driving organizational growth and anticipating regulatory changes to discovering practical tech solutions shared by peers, participants will gain actionable strategies to strengthen their associations.

Equal parts tactical knowledge and personal sustainability, this program will leave you more prepared to lead your organization into the future, with practical techniques to protect your time, energy, and peace of mind along the way.

What you'll take home

Innovation Imperative

Test new ideas, encourage innovation, and move your association forward with confidence.

Regulatory Outlook

Understand how federal accreditation changes may affect veterinary education and state practice acts.

Stress Less, Lead Well

Reduce stress, set healthier boundaries, and protect your wellbeing in demanding roles.

AI MemberShare

Use AI ethically to save time, strengthen engagement, and improve association operations.

The Conference Experience



Kick off the conference Thursday evening with a welcome reception, followed by optional small group dinners around Lexington.



A full day of learning focused on innovation, leadership, and regulatory change, followed by a relaxed group dinner with colleagues.



Saturday's program blends wellbeing, stress management, and peer-driven technology solutions to support stronger, more sustainable leadership.



Spend Saturday afternoon at Keeneland for lunch, racing, and relaxed time with colleagues in one of Lexington's signature settings.



Enjoy an optional Sunday tour and spend one more day exploring the best of the Lexington area with colleagues.

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Friday Program

The Innovation Imperative: How Thriving Associations are Moving Ahead

Presented by Mary Byers, CAE

8:30 am - Noon | 1:00 - 2:30 pm

Innovation has become one of the most talked-about topics in the association community, but what does it actually mean in practice? More importantly, how can association leaders foster innovation in organizations that are often balancing limited resources, volunteer leadership, and the demands of a rapidly changing environment?

In this engaging and interactive session, Mary explores how forward-thinking associations are embracing innovation to remain relevant, deliver greater member value, and position themselves for long-term success. Through real-world case studies and practical examples, participants will discover how organizations of all sizes are creating cultures that encourage evolution, experimentation, and continuous improvement.

Rather than focusing solely on big, disruptive ideas, this program highlights the power of "small bets" and low-risk experiments that can lead to meaningful organizational learning and impact. Attendees will gain actionable strategies for identifying opportunities, testing new approaches, learning from failures, and building momentum for innovation throughout their organizations.

Part presentation and part facilitated working session, this program challenges participants to think about their association's future while providing tools they can immediately put into practice. Special attention will be given to the critical role that boards and volunteer leaders play in supporting innovation, managing risk appropriately, and creating an environment where new ideas can flourish.

Don't miss this guided session designed to help you think deeply about the future your organization and how you can best lead it!

The Changing Regulatory Landscape: What Impending Federal Rules Mean for Veterinary Education and State Practice Acts

2:45 - 3:15 pm

The U.S. Department of Education is expected to publish regulations shortly that will significantly impact accreditation of higher education programs and institutions in the U.S., including veterinary colleges. The profession has an enormous stake in ensuring that any emerging accreditation system serves students, educational institutions, and the public, while supporting excellence in veterinary medical education. All our associations may be impacted by these changes, with pertinent language in state practice acts expected to undergo review for compliance with the new federal rules. With the rules possibly taking effect as early as July 2027, we invited several knowledgeable stakeholders to provide the latest information and their perspectives on what's on the horizon, including AAVMC, AVMA, and AAVSB.

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Saturday Program

How to Embrace Your Inner Sloth: Techniques for Controlling Stress and Anxiety

Presented by Karlene Belyea, MBA

9:00 - 10:15 am

In today's fast-paced world, stress and anxiety are all too common. But even amidst the hustle, it's possible to slow down and embrace moments of relaxation – just like your inner sloth! This session will guide you through simple yet effective techniques for reducing stress, letting go of worries about the future, and regaining control over negative thoughts and emotions. You'll learn how to live more in the present moment, ask for help when needed, confidently say “no” without guilt, and more effectively multitask. Life doesn't have to feel overwhelming! By the end of the session, you'll walk away with practical, actionable strategies and wellness tips – many of which can be implemented in as little as 60 seconds to improve your overall wellbeing and enhance your day-to-day life.

MemberShare Technology Idea Exchange

Facilitated by Heather O'Steen, CAE and Tim Atkinson

10:30 am - Noon

Back by popular demand, this will be a follow up to the MemberShare Tech Idea Exchange we had at the Summer Conference. Participants will take a deeper dive with real-world cases of best uses of various artificial intelligence (AI) platforms. We will also address ethical dimensions of AI use; look at practical examples of how association leaders can save time, gain deeper member insights, strengthen board engagement, and support strategic planning without needing technical expertise; and discuss how we can use AI to create an association management system that is affordable, customized to our needs, and offers enhanced communication with members.



Saturday Afternoon at Keeneland

Lunch, racing, paddock tours, private-room overlooking the track

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Featured Speakers



Mary Byers, CAE

Mary Byers, CAE, is internationally known as a thought leader who helps associations navigate change, embrace innovation, and build a sustainable future. As co-author of *Race for Relevance: Five Radical Changes for Associations* and *Road to Relevance: 5 Strategies for Competitive Associations*, Mary is one of the association community's leading voices on organizational relevance, strategy, and transformation.

Before launching her consulting practice, Mary served for nine years as Director of Communications and Member Services for the Illinois State Dental Society. Since then, she has worked with more than 400 organizations, helping volunteer leaders and chief staff executives define their roles, clarify their vision, and lead with confidence.

Through keynote presentations, leadership programs, strategic planning retreats, board facilitation, and executive coaching, Mary helps organizations tackle complex challenges, manage difficult conversations, and identify opportunities for growth and innovation. Known for her thoughtful questions, practical insights, and engaging style, she creates environments where meaningful dialogue can occur and bold ideas can emerge.

Mary is a Certified Association Executive and the author of nine books. Whether she is working with a board of directors, coaching CEOs, or speaking from the main stage, Mary challenges leaders to think strategically, act courageously, and position their organizations for lasting success. www.marybyers.com



Karlene Belyea, MBA

Karlene is an accomplished speaker and leader with a deep passion for improving communication, culture, and well-being in the workplace. As a certified Everything DiSC® Trainer, she delivers dynamic presentations on behavioral styles, body language, generational differences, leadership, influence, and creating positive and productive work cultures. Her expertise spans wellness, work/life integration, brain training, and strategies to enhance team building, customer service, and conflict resolution.

Karlene served as the Vice President of Wellness for Mission Veterinary Partners for 6 years and brings over 30 years of experience in management and team development. Before her role at Mission Veterinary Partners, she served as the CEO of the Michigan Veterinary Medical Association for 15 years. She holds an MBA from the University of Michigan and a BA in Telecommunications from Michigan State University. Karlene is a sought-after speaker, engaging diverse groups nationwide, and also enjoys performing as a lead singer and keyboardist in a band.

Karlene is dedicated to empowering individuals and organizations to thrive in today's fast-paced world by fostering understanding, collaboration, and well-being in the workplace. For more information, visit her YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/@karlenebelyeawellbeing.

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Networking

Keeneland Racetrack Experience

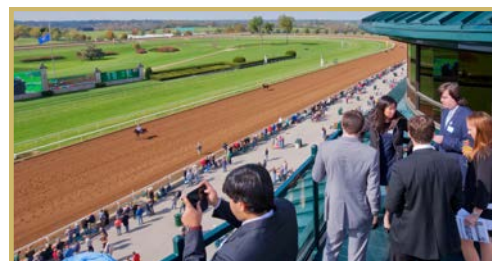
Saturday afternoon, we'll trade the meeting room for the excitement and tradition of Keeneland Racetrack, one of Lexington's most iconic destinations. Transportation will be provided as attendees head to Keeneland for lunch and an afternoon of racing from the private Keeneland Room, offering a memorable setting to enjoy the final race day of the fall meet.

The experience will include time to take in the beauty and pageantry of Keeneland, including guided tours of the paddock area where you can get an up-close look at the horses before they head to the track. For those who are interested, a Keeneland representative will also join us to explain the basics of placing a wager, making it easy to follow along and take part in the fun. Races are expected to continue until approximately 6:00 pm, giving attendees plenty of time to enjoy the atmosphere, connect with colleagues, and experience one of Lexington's signature traditions.

Dress Code: Keeneland requires business formal attire for this experience. Please [click here](#) to review Keeneland's dress code policy before packing for the conference.

The Keeneland Racetrack Experience is included in your registration fee. The fee for guests is \$200 per person and includes lunch, transportation, and the full Keeneland experience.

This activity is supported by a special grant from AVMA Insurance Services



Welcome Reception - Thursday

Sponsored by Chewy Health

Kick off the conference by reconnecting with colleagues and meeting new faces at our Welcome Reception. This relaxed gathering sets the tone for the days ahead, giving you the chance to build connections, share ideas, and enjoy light refreshments in a warm and inviting atmosphere. The reception is included in your registration, guest tickets are \$30.

Group Dinner - Friday

Please join your colleagues for a relaxed evening at Mane on Main, an elegant 15th-floor venue offering panoramic views of downtown Lexington. It's the perfect setting to continue your conversations over a memorable dinner. Your meal is included with your registration, guest tickets are \$90.

Optional Small Group Dinners - Thursday

Come out and enjoy good food and conversation on Thursday evening. VMAE will make small group dinner reservations at various restaurants in Lexington and will send out a sign-up closer to the event so you can select the restaurant you are interested in. Please note, this optional dinner is not included in the conference fee; each participant is responsible for the costs of their dinner.

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Optional Sunday Tours

You're already in the heart of Kentucky, so make the most of your visit with a special Sunday experience arranged exclusively for VMAE attendees. Choose between a private journey through Bourbon Country or a specially coordinated tour of Kentucky's legendary Thoroughbred farms, with transportation, reservations, and tour details handled for you. These experiences are designed specifically for our group, making it easy to extend your stay, explore more of the region, and enjoy one more uniquely Kentucky experience with other VMAE attendees before heading home.

Kentucky Bourbon Tour

Spend the day exploring Kentucky's legendary bourbon country with visits to **Buffalo Trace Distillery**, **Woodford Reserve Distillery**, and **Castle & Key Distillery**. The tour will depart around 10:00 am and return at around 5:00 pm. Transportation will be provided by Central Kentucky Tours, giving you a dedicated driver for the day so you can relax and enjoy the scenic journey between each destination.

The estimated cost is \$200 per person and includes round-trip transportation, scheduled distillery tours and tasting fees, lunch, and driver gratuities. With the day's planned expenses included in one price, all you need to do is sit back and enjoy the experience.

Early registration is important so reservations can be secured at each distillery and the day's itinerary can be finalized. Additional timing and lunch details will be shared with registered participants.



Kentucky Horse Country Tour

Experience the beauty and tradition of Kentucky's legendary Horse Country on a guided journey through the rolling hills surrounding Lexington. Framed by Kentucky's beautiful fall colors, the tour will include visits to a selection of local horse farms, including historic **Claiborne Farm**. Along the way, you'll learn about the region's world-renowned Thoroughbred industry and enjoy an up-close look at the horses, people, and history that make this area so special.

The tour is expected to leave the hotel around 10:00 am and return at approximately 5:00 pm. This tour will be approximately \$200 and covers the full experience, including transportation throughout the day, farm admission and tour fees, lunch, and driver gratuities. Once aboard, you can leave the driving and logistics behind and simply take in the scenery, stories, and traditions of Kentucky Horse Country.

Early registration is important so reservations can be secured with the farms and the day's itinerary can be finalized. Additional timing and lunch details will be shared with registered participants.



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Hilton Lexington/Downtown

Hilton Lexington/Downtown places you in the heart of the city, where Lexington's historic character, Southern hospitality, and lively downtown atmosphere come together. Step outside the hotel and you'll be within easy walking distance of inviting restaurants, bourbon bars, cafés, local shops, public art, and some of the city's most popular gathering places. Triangle Park is just outside, offering a beautiful green space to enjoy between conference activities, while the surrounding streets make it easy to experience Lexington's food, culture, and nightlife without having to travel far.

Inside the hotel, you'll find comfortable accommodations and plenty of convenient spaces to relax and reconnect. Triangle Grille serves traditional American cuisine and Kentucky-inspired favorites overlooking the park, while Crossroads Café offers Starbucks beverages, breakfast items, sandwiches, salads, and grab-and-go selections. BBM, the hotel's lively lounge and patio, features an extensive selection of bourbons and craft beers, making it a natural place to continue conversations at the end of the day. An indoor pool, fitness center, room service, and complimentary shuttle service to and from Blue Grass Airport add to the convenience.

RESERVE YOUR ROOM



RESERVATION DEADLINE

October 6, 2026

Rooms and rate available until the deadline or until the block is sold out.



GROUP RATE

\$249 per night

plus applicable taxes and fees.



RESERVE ONLINE

Book your hotel room using our group link:

[Book Your Room](#)



RESERVE BY PHONE

Call 859-231-9000 and ask for the "VMAE26" group rate.



Scholarships

Thanks to the support provided by VMAE Strategic Initiative Partners, VMAE can offer four scholarships for the Fall Conference. Two scholarships are available to VMAE members who would not otherwise be able to participate due to the association's limited operating budget. Two additional scholarships are available for new professionals – members who are new to VMAE and/or new to the veterinary medical association setting. Each scholarship waives the meeting registration fee and provides a reimbursement up to \$750 for travel and lodging costs.

To be considered for a scholarship, please write a brief (1-2 paragraph) explanation of your desire to participate in the Fall Conference (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, August 28, 2026**. Scholarship applicants will be notified promptly thereafter.

Thank you to our Strategic Initiative Partners

Their 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



REGISTRATION

Name: _____ Position: _____

Association: _____

Email: _____ Cell Phone: _____

Dietary Restrictions: _____

Special Accommodations: _____

PLEASE CHECK ALL EVENTS YOU PLAN TO ATTEND

- ☐ Welcome Reception - Thursday
- ☐ CE Session - Friday
- ☐ Group Dinner - Friday
- ☐ Breakfast - Saturday
- ☐ CE Session - Saturday
- ☐ Keeneland Racetrack Experience - Saturday

REGISTRATION FEES

REGISTRATION FEES INCREASE \$200 AFTER SEPTEMBER 25

- ☐ VMAE Member \$325
- ☐ VMA Staff (non-member) \$425
- ☐ VMAE Strategic Initiative Partner

GUEST TICKETS

	QTY	COST	TOTAL
Reception - Guest	_____	\$30	\$_____
Group Dinner - Guest	_____	\$90	\$_____
Keeneland - Guest	_____	\$200	\$_____
Guest Package (Reception, Dinner, & Keeneland)	_____	\$290	\$_____

GRAND TOTAL: \$_____

SUNDAY TOUR INTEREST

We are planning two custom private tour options exclusively for VMAE attendees on Sunday, October 25. Please indicate your interested so we can finalize transportation, reservations, and pricing.

- ☐ Bourbon Country Tour
- ☐ Horse Country Tour

Number interested, including yourself and any guests: _____

PAYMENT INFORMATION

- ☐ Visa
- ☐ MasterCard
- ☐ American Express

Credit card #: _____ Expiration date: _____

Cardholder's name printed: _____ Security Code: _____

Cardholder's signature: _____

Billing address: _____

City, State/Province, Zip Code: _____

Register online at www.vmae.org

Cancellations received before October 8 will receive a full refund less a \$50 administrative fee.

No refunds will be issued for cancellations after October 8 or for no shows.

Register before September 25 and save \$200