



**BUILD STRONG. STAY STRONG.**  
***Building Economic Resilience & Preparedness in Washington's Communities***  
**2026 WEDA WINTER CONFERENCE**  
Saint Martin's University & the Governor's Mansion – Legislative Reception

**Agenda**

**Tuesday, February 24, 2026**

7:00 pm **Informal No-Host Pre-Conference Dinner** (Brewery City Pizza, Lacey)

**Wednesday, February 25, 2026**

9:30 - 11:00 am **WEDA Q1 2026 Board Meeting** – *Board Members & WEDA Staff only* (Capital Room, Hampton Inn & Suites Olympia/Lacey)

11:30 am - 12:00 pm **Conference Registration Opens** (Norman Worthington Conference Center, Saint Martin's University, Lacey)

12:00 - 12:30 pm **Buffet Lunch & Interactive Networking** (Norman Worthington Conference Center)  
Sponsor: Greater Spokane, Inc.

**Welcome and Introductions:** Gina Stark, CEO, Stark Impact Consulting & WEDA Board Chair

12:30 - 1:00 pm **Opening General Session**  
Sponsor: Grow America

**Land Acknowledgement &**

**Tribal Welcome: Cheebo Frazier, Vice Chairwoman, Nisqually Indian Tribal Council**

Remarks from WEDA Leadership & Sponsors

1:00 - 1:40 pm **BUILD STRONG: *How Can We Build Economic Resilience & Preparedness in Our Communities?***  
Sponsor: Pierce County

**Keynote Speaker: Aaron Davis, Deputy Executive Director, BuildStrong America**

1:40 - 2:30 pm **Fireside Chat: *Resources, Best Practices & Reflections on How We Should BUILD STRONG. STAY STRONG.***  
Sponsor: Port of Vancouver, USA

**Moderator:** Gina Stark, CEO, Stark Impact Consulting & WEDA Board Chair

**Featured Panelists:**

- Abe Diaz, Senior Manager for Disaster Relief, Amazon
- Robert Ezelle, Director, Emergency Management Division, WA Military Department
- US Small Business Administration (SBA) Pacific Northwest Region Administrator Apollo Fuhrman

2:30 - 3:00 pm

**Snack Break**

Sponsor: Washington Center for Employee Ownership

3:00 - 4:30 pm

**WEDA 2026 Economic Development Awards Ceremony  
*Honoring Outstanding Achievement in Economic Development***

Sponsor: Washington State Microenterprise Association

*All nominees will be recognized and brief presentations will be given by award winners.*

**Host:** Amanda Wallner, Economic Development Manager, City of Richland & WEDA Board Vice Chair & Awards Committee Chair

5:30 - 7:00 pm

**WEDA Legislative Reception (Governor's Mansion)**

Sponsor: Impact Washington

**Featured Speaker:**

**Washington State Department of Commerce Interim Director Sarah Clifthorne**

7:30 pm

**BUILD STRONG: Emerging Leaders Get Together** (Ricardo's Kitchen + Bar, The Fireside room, 676 Woodland Square Loop SE, Lacey)

8:00 – 9:30 pm

**STAY STRONG: *Building Partnerships & Friendships, Old & New: After Hours No-Host Get Together*** (Ricardo's Kitchen + Bar, The Fireside room, 676 Woodland Square Loop SE, Lacey)

Sponsor: Washington Small Business Development Center

**Thursday, February 26, 2026**

8:00 am

**Conference Registration Opens** (Norman Worthington Conference Center, Saint Martin's)

8:00 - 8:45 am

**Buffet Breakfast & Interactive Networking** (Norman Worthington Conference Center)

Sponsor: Economic Development Board for Tacoma-Pierce County

8:45 - 9:30 am

**Morning General Session: *Building Washington's Economic Resilience***

Sponsor: Thurston Economic Development Council

**Host & Moderator:** Betty Baublits, Economic Development Director, Pierce County & WEDA Immediate Past Board Chair

**Keynote Speaker: Washington State Treasurer Mike Pellicciotti**

9:30 - 10:30 am

**Washington State Key Industry Sector Partners Panel: *Emerging Trends, Innovations & Opportunities for Building Washington's Economic Resilience***

Sponsor: Washington State Department of Commerce

**Moderator:** Kirk Esmond, Innovation & Industry Partnerships Director, Office of Economic Development & Competitiveness, Washington State Department of Commerce

**Panelists:**

- Joshua Berger, Founder & President/CEO, Maritime Blue
- Mel Clark, President & CEO, CleanTech Alliance
- Kayla Coffee, CEO & President, Aerospace Futures Alliance
- Rianne Ham, Assistant Director, Farm & Food Systems Development Division, Washington State Department of Agriculture
- Laura Ruderman, CEO, Technology Alliance

10:30 - 11:00 am

**Roundtable Strategic Discussions with Key Commerce/State Agency Staff & Industry Partners: *Building Washington's Economic Opportunities & Resilience***  
Sponsor: Washington State Department of Enterprise Services

11:00 am - 12:00 pm

**Legislative Discussion with WEDA Partners: *Building Washington's Economic Opportunities & Resilience through Partnerships & Shared Interests***  
Sponsor: Clallam Economic Development Council

**Moderator:** Brant Mayo, Executive Director, Grant County Economic Development Council & WEDA Board Treasurer

**Panelists:**

- Candice Bock, Director of Government Relations, Association of Washington Cities
- Eric ffitch, Executive Director, Washington Public Ports Association
- Kris Johnson, President & CEO, Association of Washington Business
- Derek Young, Executive Director, Washington State Association of Counties
- William Westmoreland, CEO, PacMountain Workforce Development Council on behalf of Washington Workforce Association

12:00 - 1:30 pm

**Lunch & Legislative Update: *Responding to the Call for Action As We Work to BUILD STRONG. STAY STRONG.***

Sponsor: Pacific Northwest Hydrogen Association (PNWH2)

**Legislative Economic Development Leaders Panel**

Sponsor: Port of Seattle

**Moderator:** Michael Cade, Executive Director, Thurston Economic Development Council & WEDA Board Incoming Chair & Legislative Committee Chair

**Featured Speakers (*pending Floor activity*):**

- House Technology, Economic Development & Veterans Committee Chair Cindy Ryu (D-32<sup>nd</sup> District-NW King & SW Snohomish Counties)
- House Technology, Economic Development & Veterans Ranking Member Stephanie Barnard (R-8<sup>th</sup> District-Tri Cities)

**Closing Session: *Building Economic Resilience and Preparedness in Washington's Communities – The Malden Wildfire Recovery Story***

Sponsor: Avista

**Featured Speaker & Moderator:**

- Paul Kimmell, Regional Business Manager, Avista

**Featured Speakers:**

- Jody Opheim, Executive Director, Partners for Rural Washington
- Molly Sanchez, Chief Community Investment Officer, Innovia Foundation

**Closing Remarks & Action Items: *Our Call for Action* - BUILD STRONG. STAY STRONG.**

***Special Thanks to Our 2026 WEDA Sponsors!***



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**2026 WEDA SUMMER CONFERENCE**

Please save August 4-6, 2026  
for our annual Summer Conference in the Tri-Cities!

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