



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 as of 2/15/2026 11:10 PM

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: Cheeb 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 Fuhriman

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 Clifforne

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: Stephen McFadden, Deputy Executive Director, Port of Pasco & WEDA Board Vice Chair

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-32nd District-NW King & SW Snohomish Counties)
- House Technology, Economic Development & Veterans Ranking Member Stephanie Barnard (R-8th 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, Innova Foundation

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

Special Thanks to Our 2026 WEDA Sponsors!



**Pierce County
Economic Development**



Port of Vancouver USA



Washington State Microenterprise Association



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