

aer
Association for Education & Rehabilitation of the Blind & Visually Impaired

2026 AER INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Sharing Our Stories – Impacting The Future

DATE

July 29 -
August 2,
2026

VENUE

Louisville Marriott Downtown
280 West Jefferson ST
Louisville, KY 40202

REGISTRATION

SOCIAL MEDIA

Instagram
Facebook
LinkedIn

www.aerbvi.org/international-conference

SAVE THE DATE FOR 2028

July 26 - 30, 2028



Pittsburgh, PA

AER International Conference 2028

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Association for Education & Rehabilitation of the Blind & Visually Impaired

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Association for Education & Rehabilitation of the Blind & Visually Impaired

A SPECIAL WELCOME FROM AER PRESIDENT

Dear Colleagues,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of AER, it is my honor and privilege to welcome you to the 2026 AER International Conference.

Whether this is your first conference or one of many, thank you for being here. Your presence reflects a shared commitment to improving the lives of individuals who are blind, have low vision, are deafblind, or have multiple disabilities. Together, we represent a remarkable community of educators, rehabilitation professionals, researchers, administrators, families, and advocates who are united by a common purpose: empowering those we serve to live lives of independence, opportunity, and fulfillment.

This conference is more than a series of presentations—it is an opportunity to learn from one another, challenge our thinking, celebrate innovation, and strengthen the relationships that make our profession so special. I encourage you to explore new ideas, engage in meaningful conversations, reconnect with colleagues, and build new partnerships that will continue long after we leave here.

Our field continues to evolve, bringing both exciting opportunities and significant challenges. Yet I remain optimistic because of the dedication, expertise, and passion of AER members. Together, we are shaping the future of services for individuals with visual impairments and deafblindness.

Thank you to our Conference Committee, presenters, sponsors, volunteers, and AER staff for the countless hours invested in making this event possible. Your commitment is deeply appreciated.

I hope you leave this conference inspired, energized, and equipped with new ideas to take back to your schools, agencies, universities, and communities.

Welcome to the 2026 AER International Conference. I am grateful you are here, and I wish you a wonderful conference experience.

Sincerely,
Dr. Rebecca L. Renshaw
President, AER International

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A SPECIAL WELCOME FROM AER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

DearDear AER Colleagues and Friends,

Welcome to Louisville and the 2026 AER International Conference.

This year's theme, Sharing Our Stories – Impacting the Future, reflects the heart of AER. Our stories connect us, help us learn from one another, and remind us why this work matters. During the next several days, I hope you will explore new ideas, reconnect with colleagues, meet someone new, and take part in the conversations that will shape the future of our profession.

A conference of this size is only possible because of the work of many people. I am grateful to our Conference Committee, Board of Directors, presenters, sponsors, exhibitors, volunteers, and the Kentucky Chapter for helping bring this event together.

I also want to recognize the AER staff. This conference has asked a great deal of them, and they have responded with professionalism, patience, flexibility, and a deep commitment to AER and its members. Their long hours and attention to countless details made this conference possible, and I am proud to work alongside them.

Thank you for being here and for investing your time, knowledge, and energy in this community. I hope you leave Louisville inspired, connected, and reminded that the work we do together has lasting impact.

Sincerely,
Lee Sonnenberg
Executive Director
Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired

AER STAFF

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eLearning and Professional Development Manager

MELISA MATTHEWS
Social Media Manager

WELCOME FROM THE AER INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE 2026

Dear Attendees,

Welcome to Louisville, AER!!! I am so happy to have you all here! We are in for a great conference full of great professional development opportunities and community excursions to APH and the Dot Experience and VIPS! In addition to the conference there is lots to do in Louisville so be sure to visit this exciting city and all it has to offer. Thanks to the Conference Committee for putting this conference together. A very special thanks to the AER staff and Lee for all of the effort and organization that goes into putting a conference of this size together for us. We all truly appreciate all of the countless hours you all put in to make the AERBVI 2026 International Conference happen. Again, I wish everyone a warm welcome. Enjoy the conference!

Olaya Landa-Vialard

CONFERENCE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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MARY NELLE MCLENNAN

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WELCOME FROM THE AER KENTUCKY CHAPTER (KAER)

AER International Conference 2026 • Louisville, Kentucky • July 29 – August 2, 2026

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

On behalf of the Kentucky Chapter of the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (KAER), welcome to the AER International Conference 2026 in Louisville. It is a special honor to host you in our home state, and a deeply meaningful one for me personally as I conclude my time as KAER President.

This year's theme, *Sharing Our Stories – Impacting the Future*, captures the truest work of our field. Every story we carry—of a child reading braille for the first time, of an adult regaining independence through orientation and mobility, of a family discovering that low vision does not mean low expectations—becomes a thread in something larger than any one of us. When we gather to share these stories, we are not simply reflecting on the past. We are writing the next chapter for the students, clients, and professionals who will follow us.

Kentucky knows something about stories. Ours is a state where hospitality is offered freely and where the next chapter always matters more than the last. That spirit lives in KAER, and it lives in every professional who has chosen this work.

To the KAER Board: thank you. Your steady commitment, your countless unseen hours, and your belief in this community have made everything possible. Serving alongside you has been one of the great privileges of my career. The future of our chapter is bright because of the story you continue to write together.

May this conference leave you inspired, connected, and ready to shape what comes next.

Warmly,
Amanda Lannan, Ph.D.
President, Kentucky Chapter (KAER)
Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired

KAER CONFERENCE COMMITTEE:

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seeingeye.org

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Session Room Sponsor
8760 Manchester Road
St. Louis, MO 63144
visionservealliance.org

GENERAL INFORMATION

Cross Streets

- W. Liberty St (South Side)
- W. Jefferson St/E US Highway 60 (North Side)
- 3rd Street (West Side)
- 2nd Street (East Side)

Main Entrances

- Mid-block on W. Jefferson. The entrance is set back into the building to accommodate for a guest drop off noted by a brick paver texture. The entry is a revolving door flanked on both sides by standard glass doors.
- A secondary entrance is on Jefferson Street just east of the main entrance. The entrance is marked by a step up into a patio area for Starbucks. To access this entrance, you will need a room during evening hours.

Elevators and Escalators

There are two sets of elevators for use during the conference. To the south of the hotel front desk there is a banket of seating and a small inlet with 6 elevators. With these elevators you can access the 2nd floor for the conference or hotel guest floors utilizing your room key. To the north of the hotel desk is a Starbucks cafe, a set of two elevators are tucked in behind the cafe on the left or west side. These elevators can be used to access the 2nd floor and the parking garage. The escalators are tucked in behind the right or east side of the cafe.

ROUTES

From valet parking to reception desk

If you would like assistance to the desk, the Valet on duty will be to the right of the revolving doors on the outside of the building and will be able to call for assistance.

When exiting your vehicle, the entrance to the hotel should be on the passenger side of the vehicle. With your back to the vehicle continue forward, the revolving door is in the center and flanked by two standard glass push doors. If you choose the standard doors, proceed through the secondary door into the lobby. This is a wide-open space with several seating arrangements of a variety of high, low, and no back seats with a bar directly in front of you on the south wall. Once inside the lobby the hotel registration area is to your left/east spanning the bulk of the east wall of the lobby.

From Starbucks entrance to Reception desk

To access the entry door, you will need to step up onto the Starbuck patio and proceed forward to the door. If after hours you will need your room key to access the building. Once you enter the building on your immediate right are the escalators. Proceed to the right down the hallway with the escalators and Starbucks on your right. This area can become congested during peak coffee hours. As the hallway ends you will begin to hear the lobby open up to your left. Turn to the left and continue forward, the registration desk will be on your left and span the bulk of the east wall of the lobby.

AROUND THE HOTEL

Food

Restaurants connected to the hotel:

- Starbucks (access from lobby, along the north wall)
- The Porch (access from lobby, northwest corner)

Restaurants within walking distance of the hotel:

Off 2nd Street

- Parlour Pizza, 133 W. Liberty St
- Troll Pub Under the Bridge, 150 W Washington St
- Con Huevos! 400 S. 2nd St
- I love Tacos, 400 S 2nd St. (Fall City Market 1st floor)

Off 4th street

- Potbelly Sandwich, 302 S. 4th St
- Sway, 320 W. Jefferson St
- Chipotle, 315 S. 4th St.
- Smashburger, 312 S. 4th St.
- Dunkin Doughnuts, 320, S. 4th St.
- Jimmy Johns, 415 W. Jefferson St.
- Qdoba, 312 S. 4th St

Other restaurant options within walking distance:

- Mi Casita on 4th, 520 S. 4th St Suite 100
- Pizza Bar Louisville, 445 S. 4th St, in 4th street live plaza
- In Season Harvest Kitchen, 324 W. Main St.
- Whiskey Dry, 412 S. 4th St., in 4th street live plaza
- TGI Fridays, 415 S. 4th St., in 4th street live plaza
- Guy Fieri's Smokehouse, 434 S. 4th St., in 4th street live plaza
- Gordon 41Biersch Brewery Restaurant, 400 S. 4th St, in 4th street live plaza
- Jeff Ruby's Steakhouse, 325 W. Main St.
- Doc's Bourbon Room, 129 W. Main St.
- Vincenzo's, 150 S. 5th St.
- Pokehana, 436 W. Market St.
- Proof on Main, 702 W. Main St.
- Doc Crow's, 127 W. Main St.
- Brazeiros Louisville-Brazilian Steakhouse, 450 S. 4th St, in 4th street live plaza
- Bob's Steak & Chophouse, 400 S. 2nd St.
- Neighborhood Services, 400 S. 2nd St
- Southern Restaurant & Lounge, 301 W. Market St.
- The Old Spaghetti Factory, 235 W Market St.
- Melba's Culinary Canvas, 430 W. Jefferson St.
- Sunergos Coffee, 231 S. 5th St.
- Manhattan Grill, 429 W. Muhammad Ali Blvd.

- PBR Louisville: A cowboy bar, 432 S. 4th St, in 4th street live plaza
- Chop and Roll, 400 S. 2nd St.
- Con Huevos Craves, 400 S. 2nd St.
- Osaka Japanese, 426 W. Market St.
- The Gruv Sports Bar and Lounge, 434 W. Market St.

OTHER

Closest Pharmacies

- CVS Pharmacy, 340 W. Muhammad Ali Blvd
- Community Pharmacy, 532 S. 4th Street
- Walgreens Pharmacy, 200 E. Broadway

ATMs near the hotel

- 5th/3rd Bank, Southeast corner of 4th and Liberty
- Chase, one block west on Jefferson midway on the south side of the street
- Hotel lobby along the west wall, between the Belmont and Aqueduct rooms

Area Hospitals and Quick Care centers

- Kaiser Permanente, 546 S. 4th St.
- Kindred Hospital Louisville at Jewish Hospital, 200 Abraham Flexner Way
- Norton Hospital, 200 E. Chestnut St
- U of L Hospital, 530 S. Jackson St
- Metro Urgent Care Broadway, 727 Broadway St
- Cardinal Family Care, 312 S. 4th St.
- Concentra Urgent Care, 901 W. Broadway St
- U of L Health Urgent Care Plus-Parkland, 2746 Virginia Ave.

Office Supplies/Print Shop

- UPS store, 325 W. Main St & 400 S. 2nd St.
- FedEx Office Print & Ship Center, 315 W. Market St.
- Office Depot, 4515 Shelbyville Rd. (transportation required)
- Staples, 3058 Bardstown Rd. (transportation required)

VETERNARIANS

Open 24 hours

BluePearl Pet Hospital
13160 Magisterial Dr. Louisville, KY
502-431-3612

VEG ER for Pets
4607 Shelbyville Rd Louisville, KY
502-497-1853

Urgent Care with limited hours

Louisville Veterinary Urgent Care (9am-6pm M-F)
12937 Shelbyville Rd #101 Louisville KY
502-792-7600

Animal Emergency Center (8 pm-2 am)
3321 Red Roof Inn Plaza Louisville, KY
502-456-6102

Chapter and Division Events

THURSDAY, JULY 30, 2026

Arizona AER Meet and Greet 5:45-7:00pm

Access and Technology Professional Division Meeting 12:45-1:30pm

Administration and Management Professional Division Meeting 1:45-2:30pm

Aging Interest Group Meeting 11:45am-12:30pm

Deafblindness Interest Group Meeting 1:45-2:30pm

Education Curriculum Interest Group Meeting 1:45-2:30pm

Infant, Toddler, and Preschool Professional Division Meeting 12:45-1:30pm

International Services and Global Issues Interest Group Meeting 12:45-1:30pm

Itinerant Personnel Interest Group Meeting 11:45am-12:30pm

Low Vision Therapy Professional Division Meeting 11:45am-12:30pm

Multiple Disabilities and Visual Impairment Interest Group Meeting 12:45-1:30pm

Neurological Visual Impairment Interest Group Meeting 11:45am-12:30pm

Northeast AER Meet & Greet 5:45-7:00pm

Orientation & Mobility Awards Ceremony 7:00-8:00pm

Orientation & Mobility Awards Reception 8:00-9:30pm

Personnel Preparation Professional Division Meeting 11:45am-12:30pm

Psychosocial Interest Group Meeting 1:45-2:30pm

Rehab Counseling and Employment Professional Division Meeting 12:45-1:30pm

Vision Rehabilitation Therapy Professional Division Meeting 1:45-2:30pm

FRIDAY, JULY 31, 2026

Orientation and Mobility Professional Division Meeting 7:30-8:15am

Physical Activity and Recreation Interest Group Meeting 6:00-7:00pm

Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments Professional Division Meeting 7:30-8:15am

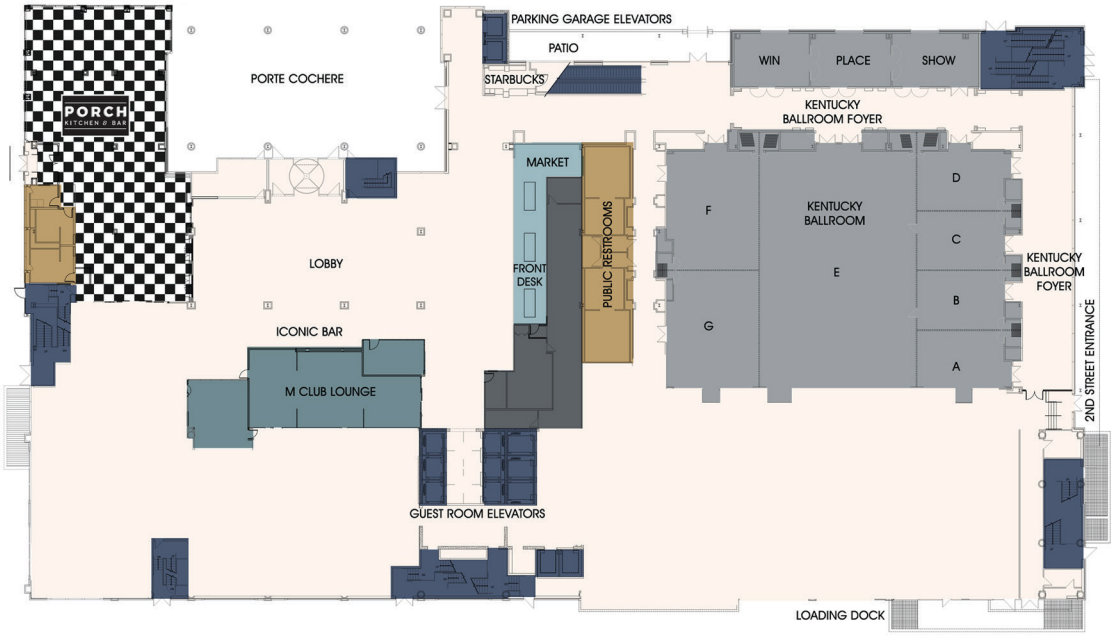
Tennessee AER Meet and Greet 4:00-5:30pm

SATURDAY, AUGUST 1, 2026

Stories on Shuffle: A Kentucky AER Host Night 6:00-9:00pm

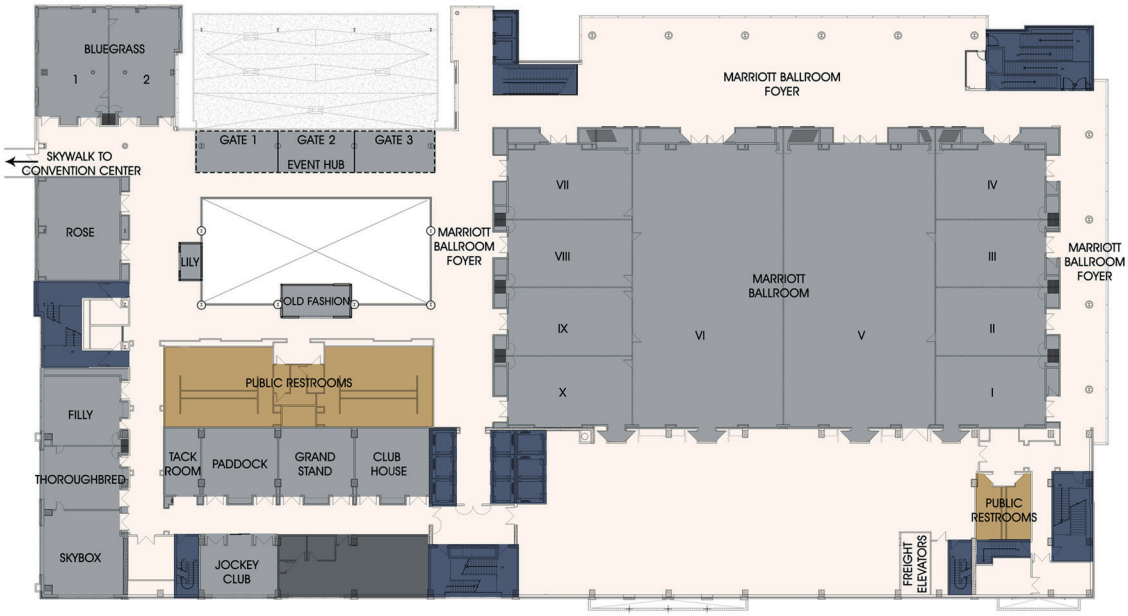
Marriott Louisville Downtown Floor Plan

Ground Level



ROOM
Kentucky Ballroom Foyer (Pre Function)
Kentucky Ballroom
A
B
C
D
E
F
G
Win
Place
Show
TOTAL

Second Level



ROOM
Marriott Ballroom Foyer (Pre Function)
Marriott Ballroom
I - IV (each)
V - VI (each)
VII - X (each)
Clubhouse
Grand Stand
Paddock
Tack Room
Jockey Club
Skybox
Filly
Thoroughbred
Rose
Bluegrass 1
Bluegrass 2
Event Hub
Gate 1 - 3 (each)
Lily
Old Fashion

MARRIOTT
LOUISVILLE
DOWNTOWN

Conference Schedule at a Glance

WEDNESDAY, JULY 29, 2026

8:30am–4:00pm Symposium Day Sessions

4:30–5:30pm Alliance Reception

4:30–5:30pm International Reception

6:00-7:30pm Opening General Session

7:30–9:00pm President's Reception

THURSDAY, JULY 30, 2026

6:00-6:45am Morning Run/Walk

8:00–9:30am Breakout Session 1

10:00-11:30am General Session

12:00-5pm Exhibit Hall Grand Opening

1:00-2:30pm Poster Sessions

11:45 am–2:30pm Professional Division and Interest Group Meetings

3:00-4:30pm Breakout Session 2

4:45-5:45pm Breakout Session 3

7:00-8:00pm O&M Awards

8:00-9:30pm O&M Reception

FRIDAY, JULY 31, 2026

6:00-6:45am Morning Run/Walk

7:00-7:30am Breakfast Buffet

7:30-8:15am Professional Division and Interest Group Meetings

8:30-9:30am AER Business Meeting

9:00-4:30pm Exhibit Hall Hours

10:00-11:00am Breakout Session 4

11:15am-12:15pm Breakout Session 5

1:45-3:15pm General Session

3:45-5:15pm Breakout Session 6

SATURDAY, AUGUST 1, 2026

6:00-6:45am Morning Run/Walk

8:00–9:30am Breakout Session 7

9:30-4:30pm Exhibit Hall Hours

10:00-11:00am Breakout Session 8

11:15am-12:15pm Breakout Session 9

1:45-3:15pm General Session

3:15-4:15pm Professional Division and Interest Group Forum

4:15-5:15pm Breakout Session 10

6:00-9:00pm Kentucky Host Night Social

SUNDAY, AUGUST 2, 2026

6:00-6:45am Morning Run/Walk

7:30-8:30am Breakfast Buffet

8:30-9:30am Breakout Session 11

9:45-10:45am Breakout Session 12

11:00am-12:30pm Closing General Session

WEDNESDAY, JULY 29, 2026 | 8:00 AM - 4:30 PM

AERLIFT LEADING FORWARD: BUILDING STRONGER AER CHAPTERS & DIVISIONS FOR THE FUTURE

The strength of every chapter and division of Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired depends on the leaders who guide it. Whether you are a current president, board member, or an emerging leader, this dynamic, one-day pre-conference workshop is designed specifically for you. Join us for an engaging and practical leadership experience that will equip you with the tools, strategies, and confidence to lead with purpose and impact. Why Attend? This is not a theoretical session—it's a hands-on, strategy-focused workshop built around the real challenges AER leaders face. Participants will; Strengthen leadership capacity Develop the skills needed to lead effectively, inspire volunteers, and sustain momentum within your chapter or division. Grow and retain membership Learn proven approaches to attract new members, engage existing ones, and build a vibrant professional community. Enhance organizational effectiveness Explore practical tools for governance, communication, and program planning that drive results. Build a leadership pipeline Discover how to identify, mentor, and prepare future leaders to ensure continuity and long-term success. Exchange ideas with peers Connect with fellow leaders from across the country to share challenges, solutions, and innovations. Building leadership capacity starts with intentional inclusion—and this workshop is the perfect place to begin. The Bottom Line-Strong leadership is the foundation of strong chapters. Strong chapters drive member engagement, professional growth, and mission impact. This workshop will help you move from maintaining your organization... to growing it, strengthening it, and leading it forward.

BUILDING A FOUNDATION FOR THE TACTILE JOURNEY

Erin Weaver, Jenny Prokes

Living in a visually rich environment, where written communication has become increasingly image-dependent, the ability to decode information presented as a graphic is an essential component of literacy. It is imperative that we foster intentional opportunities for students with visual impairments to develop the skills and concepts necessary to gather information tactually and become efficient tactile learners. In this session, we will explore the definitions and applications of braille literacy, tactile literacy, and tactile graphicacy, define the skills and concepts of tactile learning, provide examples, and link universally designed products to skills and concepts. Join us as we examine how the development of foundational tactile literacy skills guide students to true tactile graphics mastery is both an individual and community endeavor. Following this presentation, participants will be able to.... 1. Define braille literacy, tactile literacy, and tactile graphicacy for students with visual impairments. 2. Use tactile learning principles and concepts to teach effective graphics reading and perceptual skills. 3. Given an overview of available resources and tools for tactile graphics learning, evaluate your students' tactile perceptual capability and identify new areas for development and progression. This is a highly interactive and collaborative presentation. Participants will explore the APH Tactile Skills Matrix website; receive and work through the document, "Foundation Skills for Tactile Literacy: A Reference Tool for the Tactile Journey, Emergent to Advanced Skills;" and create a tactile book based on concepts learned.

REIMAGINING THE LMA PROCESS FOR CHILDREN 0-5

Kitty Edstrand,Mary Jessica chandler, Luanne Stordahl

Historically, the LMA process has focused on school-age students and the need to determine appropriate literacy media. However, singular decisions regarding the primary learning media--whether braille, auditory, print or large print—pose limitations for young children (0-5 years) who are visually impaired when determined too early. Inadvertently rushing to make a decision by a certain age restricts a young learner's potential access to the full range of media they might benefit from as they grow. Since young children's sensory and emergent literacy skills are still developing, they require a holistic, multi-sensory approach to learning and assessment. Instead, we propose a developmentally appropriate approach to the Learning Media Assessment (LMA) that is an ongoing, flexible process focusing on how a young learner engages with materials and environments over time. This approach allows for informed decisions based on on-going observation and assessment that supports the young learner's growth and adaptability. By keeping the process open and adaptive, educators and families can ensure that each young learner has the chance to succeed with media that fit their evolving needs. This also encourages a holistic, multi-sensory approach to learning that focuses on the development of the child's skills and concepts needed for accessing and interpreting any literacy media. This presentation will provide an overview of the multi-year collaboration process of several early childhood specialists/interventionists in visual impairment to draft the components and philosophical foundations of a developmentally appropriate LMA process for early childhood. Presenters will share examples of implementation, such as data collection methods and types, report writing, and thought processes/reflective practice strategies to help practitioners support the child's access to learning.

HAPTICS- USING TOUCH FOR COMMUNICATION

Beth Kennedy, Jill Gaus | 2026-07-29T08:30:00-05:00

The goal of this presentation is to build understanding of the importance of touch for communication and providing access for people who are blind, have low vision, or are DeafBlind, in particular haptics. The use of haptic signals is spreading in the DeafBlind community, but the signals may also be helpful in teaching and supporting people who are blind or have low vision as well. The presenters will begin with an overview of the continuum of how touch is used for communication in order to provide a foundation for learning and to clarify the difference between tactile sign language, haptics, and Pro Tactile. Once the stage for using touch to communicate is set, a DeafBlind adult will share their lived experience incorporating haptics into the supports received, enhancing the access for what is happening in the immediate environment and building their confidence when participating in a meeting, presenting, and navigating indoors and outdoors. About half of the session will include an overview of key haptic signals using demonstrations and simulations. Participants in the session will pair up and practice giving and receiving haptic signals, which are more similar to touch cues than to sign language. Once everyone has had time to try haptics, the presenters will provide some tips for how to incorporate haptics into instruction and interactions with people who are blind, have low vision, or are DeafBlind of various ages to augment the supports that are already in place across environments. This part of the presentation will be casual and will be open to audience questions in an effort to wrap up in a way that meets the specific needs for information in the audience.

NEW CHALLENGES: WHAT O&M SPECIALISTS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT MODERN INTERSECTIONS

Lukas Franck, Jennifer Graham, Dr. Beezy Bentzen, Margaret Robertson, Suzette May, Claudia Libis

This full-day symposium explores modern intersection features that complicate travel for pedestrians with vision loss ordeafblindness. While specific to the United States, the research provides vital information for international practice. We will examine signal timing like Leading Pedestrian Intervals (LPIs), beacons including Pedestrian Hybrid Beacons (PHBs) and Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons (RRFBs), and geometric treatments. Participants will learn to integrate Public Rights-of-Way Accessibility Guidelines (PROWAG) and Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) standards into Orientation and Mobility (O&M) instruction.

FINDING SOLUTIONS TO STRENGTHEN SERVICES FOR OLDER ADULTS THROUGH STORYTELLING

Carlie Rhoads

The story we tell ourselves—and others—about our work matters. It influences how we communicate the value of services for older adults, how we collaborate with partners, and how we shape outcomes for those we serve. This full-day, interactive symposium will explore storytelling as a powerful tool to strengthen services for older adults. Through guided discussion, shared experiences, and practical activities, participants will examine how to develop clear, compelling messaging that communicates the scope and importance of their work across audiences, including program administrators, community partners, and professionals in aging. Participants will engage in activities such as crafting “elevator stories” to describe their services, reflecting on professional standards and efficiency in practice, and sharing strategies for managing caseloads, documentation, and service delivery. The symposium will also highlight the role of storytelling in building effective collaborations, with opportunities to map community partners, explore case examples, and identify gaps in outreach. Dedicated networking time will allow participants to exchange challenges and solutions across geographic regions, fostering peer learning and connection. The final session will focus on sustaining and advancing the field, including strategies to support the new professional pipeline, opportunities for mentorship, and ways to contribute to the broader knowledge base. Participants will leave with practical tools, new connections, and actionable steps to strengthen their work and improve outcomes for older adults.

AGENDA OVERVIEW

Registration Open.....

Symposium Day Sessions .....8:30–4:30 PM

The Dot Experience Museum Tour .....9:00 AM–12:00 PM

Welcome to this special preview of The Dot Experience! As one of our earliest pre-opening events, this tour offers a unique behind-the-scenes look during an active installation period. While some exhibits and experiences are still being completed, guests will have the opportunity to explore the production floor and experience many of the museum's signature spaces as they are being set-up to prepare for our October launch. The Dot Experience is designed to expand perspectives on blindness, accessibility, innovation, and human potential through immersive, hands-on exploration. Our team will be stationed throughout the tour to provide context, share updates, showcase works in progress, and offer creative previews of exhibits that are not yet fully installed. Please plan to arrive 15 minutes before your scheduled tour time to allow time for check-in and transportation via our shuttle bus to the tour starting location. We are excited to welcome you for this exclusive early look and to share the vision, progress, and possibilities that are bringing The Dot Experience to life.

VIPS Louisville Facility Tour .....9:00 AM–12:00 PM

Join us for a special tour of VIPS and discover the impact of an organization that has been transforming lives since 1985. What began with one employee, 14 families, and a vision to fill a critical gap in services for children who are blind or have low vision has grown into a leading agency serving hundreds of families across Kentucky and Southern Indiana. During the tour, you'll see Kentucky's only full-time preschool for children with blindness or low vision, a nationally accredited program and Jefferson County's first five-star rated child care facility, while learning how VIPS continues to empower children and families every day.

Pre-Conference Session .....1:00–4:30 PM

GOING BEYOND THE PAGE OF THE NEW RE:VIEW—IN-PERSON CONVERSATIONS WITH TNR AUTHORS AND EDITORS

Adam Wilton, Dr. William Wiener, Mary Nelle McLennan

Join lively, in-person exchanges with authors and editors of The New RE:view (TNR) as they and symposium attendees explore their writing and publishing journeys. TNR Associate Editor Adam Wilton will host a live Beyond-the-Page conversation between symposium attendees and three published TNR authors—Kendra Farrow, Elaine Mara, and Jennifer Ottowitz. TNR Associate Editors Amanda English, Danene Fast, Adam Wilton and Associate Executive Editor Bill Wiener will share how our editors support authors involved in TNR's publishing processes. Our editors will also demystify the roles of peer reviewers and how the double-masked peer review process works. The afternoon will conclude with a facilitated Blue-Sky Session for you, our field's practitioners, whom we hope will be future authors in TNR! Bring your burning article ideas to discuss with the group as we gather input for TNR. This exercise is designed to spark new ideas and to harvest attendees' preferences, needs, suggestions, and questions. Come help us ignite future authors and shape future issues of TNR!

Alliance Reception .....4:30–5:30 PM

International Reception.....4:30–5:30 PM

Opening General Session ..... 6:00–7:30 PM

SHARING OUR STORIES—IMPACTING THE FUTURE

Our first general session will formally open AER's 2026 international conference, setting the stage for a remarkable week of idea sharing, learning, networking, and community. The traditional reading of the biennial Memorial List will follow a welcome and presidential address by AER President, Dr. Rebecca Renshaw. The presentation of AER's most prestigious awards—the Bauman Award and the Shotwell Award—will lead into our Keynote Address by special guest, Steven C. Baskis, SPC US Army, (Ret.) In his Keynote Address—**From Losing Vision to Finding Voice: The People, Purpose, and Possibility of Rehabilitation**—Steve Baskis, SPC US Army, (Ret.), who lost his sight while serving during Operation Iraqi Freedom, brings us a story-driven account that blends personal experience with meaningful insight into the long-term impact of rehabilitation and education. With honesty, insight, and humor, Steve will share the moving story of the routes that brought him in touch with our professions. His journey of rebuilding, not only his body and his independence, but also his identity and sense of purpose, illustrates how the combined efforts of rehabilitation professionals build foundations that extend far beyond recovery—creating a ripple effect that empowers individuals to lead, mentor, and make lasting impacts. Steve's story provides a clear and affirming message that our work matters deeply, often in ways we never fully see and that through our work in education and rehabilitation, we truly are impacting the future across communities and generations.

President's Reception..... 7:30–9:00 PM

Join fellow members for an evening of conversation and connection at the President's Reception. Mingle with colleagues, meet our current president and welcome our incoming president as we celebrate leadership and the year ahead. The evening will feature live music by the Anthony Wayne Cello Trio, creating the perfect backdrop for this special gathering.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER



STEVE BASKIS

SPC US ARMY, (RET.)

Specialist Steven C. Baskis served as an infantryman with the United States Army during the operation Iraqi freedom conflict. It was in May 2008, in the heart of Baghdad, Iraq where Steve sustained life threatening wounds that changed his life forever. Over the past decade Steve has vigorously pursued his goals, dreams and passions without falter. Strength, resilience and courage is central in his message, always reminding listeners that these are essential core values that we all must Forge. Steve has accomplished many physical feats with out sight and leads a foundation that creates awareness for the blind & visually impaired community. Steve will tell you “Moving is Living” and this is very apparent when you read about his life pursuits.

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AGENDA OVERVIEW

Morning Walk/Run *Sponsored by NW Association of Blind Athletes* ..... **6:00–6:45 AM**

Breakout Session 1 ..... **8:00–9:30 AM**

General Session ..... **10:00–11:30 PM**

THE STATE OF THE FIELD TODAY

Thursday morning's general session will bring together leaders from six national organizations in the field of blindness and low vision. **Dr. Rebecca Renshaw**, AER President, will serve as the panel facilitator. They will jointly explore key issues shaping our field today as well as the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. Panel participants include **Everette Bacon** (National Federation of the Blind), **Jason Eckert** (VisionServe Alliance), **Sarah Malaier** (American Foundation for the Blind), **Mark Richert** (AER Legislative Committee), and **Paul Schroeder** (American Printing House for the Blind).

In addition to this thought-provoking discussion, the session will open with the presentation of the Richard L. Welsh Award and the Outstanding AER Chapter Award.

Exhibit Hall Grand Opening ..... **12:00–5:00 PM**

The Dot Experience Museum Tour ..... **12:30–3:30 PM**

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Poster Sessions ..... **1:00–2:30 PM**

The conference Poster Session provides an informal forum for information sharing and discussion between presenters and attendees. Poster presentations are largely self-explanatory displays of information that the presenters personally attend during the session. Conference participants circulate through the poster session and are able to interact with the presenters on a one-on-one basis.

Breakout Session 2 ..... **3:00–4:30 PM**

Breakout Session 3 ..... **4:45–5:45 PM**

O&M Awards & Reception ..... **7:00–9:30 PM**

Join Us for the 2026 AER O&M Awards Ceremony The O&M Division invites you to celebrate with us as we recognize individuals who have made a lasting impact on the O&M profession at the 2026 AER O&M Awards Ceremony on Thursday, July 30, 2026, at 7:00 p.m. during the AER International Conference in Louisville, Kentucky. This year's honorees include Lukas Franck, recipient of the Janet Barlow Environmental Access Service Award; Jamie Maffit, recipient of the Sandy Kronick Distinguished Service Award; and Dr. Eugene Bourquin, recipient of the Lawrence E. Blaha Memorial Award. A reception will immediately follow the ceremony featuring hors d'oeuvres and a cash bar with drink tickets sponsored by Leader Dogs for the Blind (while supplies last). We hope you'll join us as we recognize these outstanding individuals and their contributions to the field.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER



DR. REBECCA RENSHAW

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, WESTERN PA SCHOOL FOR BLIND CHILDREN

Dr. Rebecca L. Renshaw serves as the President of AERBVI International and the Executive Director of the Westen PA School for Blind Children. She has worked in the field of visual impairment for the last 27 years. She has served in a number of roles—teacher of the visually impaired, orientation and mobility specialist, professor, advocate, legal expert, administrator, and on various boards. Dr. Renshaw received both her Ph.D. and Master of Education from the University of Pittsburgh's Vision Studies program. She also holds a Master of Studies in Law degree from the University of Pittsburgh Barco Law School. Additionally, she received an Executive Certificate in Non-Profit Leadership from the University of Notre Dame Mendoza College of Business and a School District Leader Certification from Bank Street College of Education.

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BREAKOUT SESSION 1 | 8:00 AM - 9:30 PM

Leadership Bootcamp: Building Confidence and Clarity in Your Leadership Journey (Part 1)

Presented by Joy Harris

The first of two sessions of this Leadership Bootcamp demystifies what leadership looks like in schools for the blind. Participants will learn from superintendents' leadership journeys and engage in an interactive workshop on practical leadership tools. By the end, attendees will identify their own leadership goals and gain clarity and confidence to pursue leadership opportunities.

GAME ON! Using Gaming Peripherals for Low Vision Computing

Presented by Larry Klug

Gaming Peripherals has been a "game changer" for users who have limited peripheral vision. Everything from larger curved monitors, touchscreens, headset with mic, backlit keyboards, and mice will be discussed during this presentation. I will share examples of clients who are benefiting from these peripherals. I will also provide information on where to find these peripherals right away.

O&M Roundtable: Remote Instruction update from ACVREP COMS Subject Matter Expert Committee

Presented by Kathleen Zeider, Dr. Justin Kaiser, Kevin Hollinger, Dr. Laura Bozeman, Margaret Winn

Join the ACVREP COMS Subject Matter Expert Committee in analyzing the statement regarding Position on Remote and/or Virtual Orientation and Mobility Instruction and Assessment. Learn the historical context and why a revision is happening now. Proposed changes will be discussed and participants will learn why the SME was compelled to make a statement in June 2026. Code of Ethics and other areas of interest will be addressed. Time for Q&A will be included.

Halfway Point of the VRT Five-Year Plan

Presented by Dan Norris

We are 2.5 years into the 5 year plan. What progress has been made? Where are the barriers? What are the opportunities? What is yet to be accomplished? Where do you personally fit in? Come and find out!

Orientation and Mobility for Individuals with Deafblindness

Anita Page, Nora Griffin-Shirley, Laura Delcambre

This presentation will provide an open discussion on orientation and mobility (O&M) strategies used to support people who are Deafblind and state the need for more qualified personnel to serve people who are Deafblind. This presentation includes an interactive activity with the intention of building sensitivity towards the community of individuals with Deafblindness.

When do you start teaching Braille to young children and how?

Presented by Tommie Roesch

When to start teaching Braille to young children has always been a hard question to answer. In this presentation, I will discuss when I start working with children on Braille and pre-Braille activities, and how I present them to the children. I will demonstrate the activities and allow the audience to explore the materials as well. In addition, the audience will have opportunities to share their experiences and discuss various techniques to work with young children.

Generative AI as Access Practice: Hands-On Strategies for Blind Screen Reader Users

Presented by Brad Blair

This session discusses ethical ways that blind people can use generative AI to accomplish school and work tasks. It will showcase how the right prompts can describe or even create visuals, how the right prompt creation can improve visual formatting, and how careful use of well-crafted prompts can render documents accessible when other solutions fail. AI is a tool that can improve productivity for a blind student or professional.

Systems Change: Priority 1 Develop/enhance expertise of the AER leadership and membership to educate decision makers using skilled "storytelling" (internal and external)

Presented by Nancy D Miller, Priscilla Rogers, Cathleen McGuire, Jason Eckert

What vocabulary and stories change attitudes and behaviors? The importance of advocacy and the role of leadership and membership (including the use of Speak 4)
Hone an elevator speech: in 60 seconds be able to say what we do using data regarding the populations needing service
Focus on service quality, follow up and outcomes
Help identify one or more "champion" spokespersons

Coding: Accessible Options for Unplugged, Digital, and Robotic Interfaces You Can Use with Your Student

Presented by Adam Nollsch, Sara Larkin

Many online coding platforms present accessibility barriers for students who are visually impaired, creating a challenge for equitable computer science education. This session explores inclusive solutions designed to ensure full participation and skill development. We'll cover "unplugged" (offline) activities, digital platforms compatible with screen readers, and engaging tangible tools and robots for a multi-sensory approach. Leave with a toolkit of ideas and resources to teach coding concepts.

Rising to the Challenge: Accessing Modern Elevators without Sight

Presented by Joey Gan, Dianne Luce

This session explores elevator accessibility for people who are blind or visually impaired, examining design features, codes, and standards—including destination-dispatch systems and tactile accessibility indicators. Practical strategies will be discussed, helping attendees connect ECC skills to promote independent, efficient, and successful elevator use.

BLV FirstSteps App – Teaching Foundational Screen Reader Skills Through Play

Presented by Michael Tuttle

BLV FirstSteps is a playful, game-based app that teaches foundational VoiceOver gestures and screen reader concepts to young students who are visually impaired. With 32 interactive progressive lessons and 13 engaging games, the app builds early tech readiness, confidence, and independence through developmentally appropriate exploration and practice. This hands-on workshop invites participants to explore BLV FirstSteps directly—please download BLV FirstSteps in the App Store and bring your iPad.

You Don't Have to be Einstein to Adapt Science for your Students!

Presented by Rosanne Hoffmann, Laura Hospitál

Join Rosanne Hoffmann and Laura Hospitál for a session on teaching science to your students with visual impairments. We can assist you in all areas including biology, chemistry, physics, earth science, and health education. It's important to inform TVIs across the country about the science resources offered by APH. The American Printing House paves the way for students with visual impairments to learn about science alongside their sighted peers.

Quality Resources from Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI) for Professionals and Families

Presented by Ann Adkins,Cecilia Robinson

Explore a rich collection of resources from Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. These resources include webinars, publications, online courses, and multiple opportunities that promote student learning, family engagement, and effective instruction. Most materials are free or at low cost. Receive curated lists of resources to guide/enhance your work. Learn how to locate existing and new resources. Use these tools to support your team's ongoing or just-in-time learning.

POSTER SESSIONS | 1:00 AM - 2:30 PM

BrailleBot: Accessible Coding Education Program for Students with Visual Impairments Using Wireless Robotics

by Jinseok Park

This poster will present the development and implementation of a comprehensive coding robot solution entitled “BrailleBot”. The system integrates braille navigation tools and gamified activities using tangible materials to make coding education accessible. We will share the development process and adaptations for students with visual impairments. Through the presentation, attendees will explore the activities and student engagement outcomes.

Collaborators in O&M: The Role of the Physical Therapist

by Jamie Maffit and Fabiana Perla

Physical Therapists (PT) and Orientation and Mobility (O&M) specialists share a goal of safe and independent movement for their patients with blindness or low vision and can be ideal collaborators. While complementary, the scope of practice and nature of intervention of each profession are distinct. PTs are often not aware of O&M services or how to support their patients with B/LV within their practice, as PT clinical education has historically included little to no training in B/LV screening,

Camp Abilities: 4 Corners

by Kasey Hopper

Camp Abilities Four Corners provides accessible and inclusive sports experiences for youth who are blind or visually impaired. This poster highlights key outcomes from recent camp sessions, including increased athlete independence, self-advocacy, teamwork, and skill development in sports such as goalball, track and field, and adapted fitness.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services That Support Job Retention for Adults Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired

by Kanako Iwanaga

This presentation shares findings from an RSA-911 analysis of factors that support job retention for adults who are blind or visually impaired. Demographic factors played a limited role, while VR services such as rehabilitation technology, diagnosis and treatment, counseling, maintenance, and job-related resources were strong predictors. Results suggest that services may buffer economic disadvantage and that individuals with secondary disabilities may need more intensive support.

Pre-Teaching Experiences of Children with Visual Impairments in Physical Education

by Lauren Lieberman and Kasey Zamberlin-Ogletree

Pre-teaching children with visual impairments has long been a teaching method promoted as an integral instructional strategy. The merits of pre-teaching have been encouraged, yet there is minimal research on pre-teaching strategies on the skill acquisition of children with visual impairments. The purpose of this study was to understand pre-teaching experiences of the twelve participants in this qualitative study. The findings revealed themes of confidence, facilitators, barriers, and routines. I

Life Cycle of an AER eLearning Webinar

by Larisa DeZayas

Explore the step-by-step process and timeline used to plan, create, and host an AER eLearning webinar or series. Discover how a presentation concept moves from an initial proposal and selection path to the live event and final recording. At the heart of this lifecycle is our community of divisions and interest groups. AER eLearning gives voice to a full spectrum of professional sharing from both seasoned experts and up-and-coming new professionals looking to gain experience and confidence.

This poster session also highlights the operational side of webinar management—including how we offer CEUs, how we support the technical needs of presenters and attendees, and how content is accessed on the online library. Come by to review the workflow, ask your questions, and chat about how to get your own passionate topics noticed and onto the schedule.

Accreditation for University Personnel Preparation Programs

by Elly du Pre

This presentation will explain the process of preparing a successful submission of materials supporting all the administrative and curricular standards required for accreditation of a program preparing students to be professionals in the fields of education and rehabilitation of people who are blind or low vision.

A Systematic Review of Inclusive Education Tensions: Applying Norwich’s Dilemma Framework to Visual Impairment

by Kazuma Sato and Miyauchi

This poster utilizes Norwich’s (2008, 2023) dilemmas of difference framework to analyze peer-reviewed English-language articles published between 1994 and 2025 on inclusive education and students with visual impairments. We examine how universal tensions—such as commonality vs. differentiation—manifest in this field. Attendees will be informed about the types of conflicts that emerge in discussions of inclusion for learners with visual impairments and will understand that many of these tensions.

Fostering Student Success and Lifelong Learning: Partnering with Libraries to Build Accessible Print and Braille-Rich Collections for Children with Vision Loss

by Camille McCutcheon

This poster presentation will celebrate how the faculty-librarian partnership provides necessary resources to support individuals preparing to teach children with vision loss. Best practices for developing partnerships with libraries will be shared, and attendees will learn how to create small collections of braille and print resources at a very low cost.

Project TVISP Scholars: Scholar Impact and Feedback Survey....What the data shows for Pre-service Graduates in Visual Impairment and School Psychology

by Chris Bischke and Emmaline Smith

The Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments and School Psychologists (TVISP) graduate pre-service project sought to encourage collaboration between these professionals at the University of Utah by collaboration through an interdisciplinary program. Courses and seminars were adapted for scholars, specialized projects were completed, and a follow-up mentor course was created. Finally, an impact study was completed to acquire scholar feedback specific to Project TVISP.

Textbook Excellence: Looking Forward With APH Press

by Zach VandeZande

"Textbook Excellence: Looking Forward With APH Press" explains how the mission of APH informs our work and how our recent publications, including the 3rd edition of Early Focus¸ embody that mission. The session also previews upcoming titles in 2026-2027 and features an information session and question and answer session on how to be involved with APH Press as an author, editor, or peer reviewer.

Preparing Researchers of the Future Through a Doctoral Apprenticeship Model

by Nora Griffin-Shirley, Laura Bozeman, and Phoebe Okungu

A doctoral apprenticeship model at Texas Tech University to prepare researchers will be described. Faculty and students will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of this model. Specifically, students will relate how this engagement assisted them in selecting and conducting their own independent research projects. The session participants will be requested to share their experiences.

Building Standards for the Expanded Core Curriculum

by Allison BIlles

The Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) plays a vital role in supporting student success during and beyond their primary and secondary school years, emphasizing the critical need for consistent assessment and instruction in each of its areas. This session introduces the proposed ECC standards for Texas, outlines the process and rationale behind their development, and provides participants with an opportunity to discuss implementation strategies and offer feedback to inform the next steps.

Understanding Mental Health and Suicide-Related Needs of People with Visual Impairments: Findings from a National Survey

by Carlie Rhoads and Kristina Henderson

People with visual impairments experience higher rates of depression and suicidal ideation, yet little research captures their lived experiences or access to care. This session presents results from a national survey exploring mental health challenges, service barriers, and suicide-related needs, offering actionable strategies to enhance accessibility, prevention, and support within the vision field.

ECC for All Using THRIVER Formula

by Corinna "Cori" Andrews

THRIVER formula, I will demonstrate that ECC principles support and empower individuals who are blind or visually impaired at every stage of life. The THRIVER formula—blends the foundational skills of the ECC (practical skills) with Jack Canfield's Success Principles (inner tools), offering a comprehensive approach to lifelong learning and thriving. THRIVER stands for Tools, Handicap/Handicable, Responsibility, Independence/Interdependence, Value, Emotion, and Risk-taking. Each element aligns with one or more areas of the ECC, illustrating the curriculum's ongoing relevance beyond the classroom and into adulthood and older age. Thriving Blind Academy serves as an online resource and community for both adults and families navigating blindness or visual impairment, further bridging ECC concepts with real-world needs. The goals of this presentation are twofold: First, participants will be able to match each of the nine ECC areas to corresponding components within the THRIVER formula, recognizing how these skills and concepts support individuals from early childhood through later life. Second, attendees will gain the tools to articulate how the ECC benefits individuals who are blind or visually impaired across all life stages, broadening their understanding of its application well beyond traditional student populations. This session is designed to equip educators, professionals, and advocates with practical strategies for leveraging the ECC to foster independence, confidence, and success at any age.

Living Your Best, Bold, Blind and Visually Impaired Life: How the Boldly BVI Podcast is Making a Difference and Changing Lives

by Stephanie Jones, Brian Anderson, and Kelly Lusk

The Boldly BVI podcast, produced by the Clovernook Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired (BVI), is in its 2nd season and encourages those who are BVI to live their life boldly. The podcast interviews guests who can offer their unique perspective by sharing tips on being blind and/or influencing others to learn, grow, and tackle challenges head-on. The podcast includes a traditional format, a spotlight series, and has even been taken on the road across the country and world.

Jeff Lee's Braille Trainer® Advanced: Deep Engagement Systems for Grade II UEB Literacy Through Accessible Game Design

by Jeff Lee

Jeff Lee's Braille Trainer® Advanced is a fully evolved Grade II Braille learning environment that integrates structured literacy instruction with a multi-genre Tower Defense–RPG–Roguelike game engine. This session offers a guided, 90-minute demonstration of the advanced mode, where every

mechanic—from combat actions to progression routes—is directly linked to Grade II Braille accuracy and fluency. Participants will see how accessible game design can function as a powerful instructional tool for learners who benefit from repeatable, multisensory practice. The session begins with an overview of the program's architecture, accessibility features, and design principles that support navigation through keyboard, touch, or screen-reader use. Attendees will then observe live gameplay featuring a dozen battlefield actions, environmental effects, inventory and equipment systems, upgrades, an in-game shop, event decks, and a full boss encounter. These interconnected systems show how Braille mastery unlocks increasing depth, engagement, and autonomy—transforming literacy practice into an integrated adventure. No prior experience with Jeff Lee's Braille Trainer® is required, though familiarity with Grade I or Grade II Braille may enhance comprehension of the instructional decisions behind each mechanic. Educators will see how the program reinforces reading and writing through rapid-fire challenges, immediate feedback, rewards, and long-form progression. Rehabilitation professionals will observe how the platform supports sustained practice, confidence building, and independent skill development. Attendees will gain insight into how accessible gamification can complement traditional instruction, providing learners a motivating pathway toward Braille proficiency. By the session end, participants will understand how Jeff Lee's Braille Trainer® can support structured lessons, customized learning plans, and ongoing literacy maintenance—offering a versatile tool for both instruction & long-term Braille mastery.

Finding Their Why: Motivations and Pathways Into the Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments Profession

by Madeline Chastain and Rachel Schles

Join us to hear the results of a national study examining why individuals pursue licensure as Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments (TVIs). First, we will discuss survey findings, including the motivations and recruitment strategies which drew folks into the field. The second half of the session, we will facilitate an open discussion with attendees to brainstorm how to address ongoing personnel shortages and redesigning recruitment pipelines into university preparation programs.

Teaching Basic ASL Signs to a Low Vision Learner: Challenges and Workarounds

by Erika Fundelius, Elaine Mara, and Dreama Compton

This session shares the experiences of two learners—one with low vision and one who is hard of hearing—in a graduate course on instructional strategies for students with multiple disabilities. The course objective of 50 ASL signs needed to be taught and learned. Workarounds, pedagogical approaches such as professional videos, hand-under-hand techniques, descriptive mediation, and peer support will be shared.

Use of Peer Tutoring in Inclusive Settings for Students with Visual Impairments

by Ozge Cihan and Mehmet Akif Cihan

Peer tutoring is an effective instructional approach within collaborative learning environments. This systematic review examines how peer tutoring has been used to support students with visual impairments in inclusive settings. Findings from empirical studies show its effectiveness in teaching social skills, improving academic engagement, and enhancing overall academic success.

Learning Braille the Bee Bop Way- Research based!

by Karen Carl

In 2016, I presented Bee Bop Your Way Through Braille. Now there's research to show its efficacy! Come and hear about this unique program and how teaching by categories can help engage your students and help them power through the code. Then they can get on to the business of developing their reading skills.

The Next Chapter in Literacy: Essential Knowledge to Impact Learners' Futures

by Julie Majzel and Angela Wolf

A substantial body of evidence suggests that teachers' literacy content knowledge impacts learners' futures. This session combines research results with practical applications to provide educators with the capacity-building content knowledge and specific strategies necessary to ensure that all learners, including those with complex access needs, receive research-based literacy instruction that facilitates future employment, full social inclusion, health, and an overall high quality of life.

Perspectives on Digital Content Access: Amplifying the Voices of Key Stakeholders to Maximize the Education of Blind and Low Vision Students

by Kerry Leuders

This presentation summarizes a qualitative dissertation research study on access to digital content within the public school context. Focus group interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including students who are blind or have low vision, subject matter experts in the field of visual impairment and digital access, and general education teachers who have taught blind or low vision students in their mainstreamed classrooms. Themes in the data, quotes, and implications will be discussed.

Perceptions of Parent Versus Child Ableism in BLVVI Youths

by Dannielle Schutz and Arianna Albertorio

The poster will discuss preliminary differences between parent and child perceptions of ableism. It will also detail further analyses of ableism and potential risk factors and protective factors to enhance quality of life and development of blind and low vision youths. Other future directions for the NIH funded project will be discussed.

Selection and Implementation of Tangible AAC Symbols for Visually Impaired Students: Results of a National Survey

by Rachel Schles, Tabitha Revak, and Melissa Hawkins

Abstract (90 words/500 characters): Join us to discuss a national survey of TVIs, SLPs, and special education teachers' selection and implementation of tangible AAC symbols for students with VI. Survey results include individuals vs

standardized symbols, assessments, and correlations between students/teacher factors and initial implementation. Attendees are encouraged to share their own perspectives and resources that have been impactful for providing students access to tangible AAC.

Partnering with Your State Library's Talking Books Services: Providing Accessible Materials to Individuals with Vision Loss

by Camille McCutcheon and Tina Herzberg

This presentation will celebrate how this partnership with the S.C. State Library has evolved into an annual event, raising awareness of Talking Books Services' critical services for the citizens of South Carolina. Best practices for developing partnerships with your State Library will be shared, and attendees will learn about the services Talking Books Services offers, as well as strategies for holding a Talking Books Services open house event.

GPT-Powered Image Description Generation: User Experience, Prompting Strategies, and Considerations for Teachers, Braille Transcribers, and Adapted Material Specialists

by Jinseok Park

This poster presents a GPT-based multimodal AI system for automatically generating long image descriptions and shares findings from both expert evaluation and user experience surveys. The GPT-based system demonstrated high-quality output comparable to human-generated descriptions, though challenges. The presenter will share effective prompting strategies, user-identified improvement needs, implementation recommendations, and live demonstrations using diverse learning content.

Sense of Belonging in Hybrid Programs in Blindness & Low Vision: Insights from a Pilot Tool

by Fabiana Perla and Gregory Benjamin

This poster presents findings from an exploratory study examining how graduate students in hybrid programs in blindness and low vision perceive & value a sense of belonging. Through focus groups, we explored students' experiences and perspectives on belonging within hybrid learning environments. Insights from these discussions informed the development of a pilot instrument which was implemented to assess its feasibility and potential for future research and program improvement.

Assessing Tennis Skill Competence

by Lauren Lieberman, Emily Gilbert, and Breanna Bowman

Blind tennis is a The purpose of this study was to explore actual blind tennis skills of youth in the northeast region of the US. The feasibility of coaches using NETGen assessment tools was analyzed. The findings indicate acceptable levels of psychometrics for item analysis and internal consistency for adoption by practitioners for the purpose of talent identification and/or motor skill assessment for youth with visual impairments in the northeast.

Why Do We Still Need Schools for the Blind in an Era of Inclusive Education? Perspectives from Teachers in Japan and Taiwan

by Chunhui Wu

This presentation analyzes why schools for the blind remain essential in inclusive education. Interviews with teachers in Japan and Taiwan show that these schools offer supports mainstream schools often cannot, such as Braille instruction, mobility training, assistive technology, emotional support, and independent living skills. Teachers also noted risks students may face in mainstream settings. The findings stress that meaningful inclusion depends on steady, specialized support.

How Do We Stay Current? Building an Effective and Nimble Assistive and Access Technology Course in Higher Education in the Remote Learning Climate

by Christine Bischke

Assistive and Access Technology for students who are blind or have low vision (B/LV) is a critical part of instruction for effective learning. Preparing teachers of students with visual impairments (TSVIs) in this area can be challenging to keep up with current advances in devices, as well the changing needs of students and school districts. Solutions collected from students, and other university programs will provide data for an improved Assistive and Access Technology remote learning course.

Quality of Life in Young Adults at Schools for the Blind: Associations with Enrollment Length and Social Capital

by Erika Matsuda and Hisae Miyauchi

This session presents a study on the quality of life (QOL) of young adults with visual impairment enrolled in vocational programs at schools for the blind in Japan. Using survey data from 100 students, the study examined how length of enrollment and social capital (SC) relate to QOL. Findings suggest that enrollment is associated with QOL and that SC strengthens the positive association between enrollment length and psychosocial QOL.

Inclusive Learning needs accessible Space: The New Building of Betty Hirsch School Center in Stuttgart, Germany

by Anne Reichmann

The new building of Betty Hirsch School in Stuttgart, Germany, is designed as a state-of-the-art educational facility for inclusive and barrier-free learning. It provides perfect access to education for all students — with visual impairments, blindness, complex disabilities, or no disabilities. Central is a commitment to strengthening self-esteem, ensuring full participation and promoting self-determination. The building and its outdoor spaces foster academic growth and community integration.

NIMAC, Louis, and TGIL: Resources for AMPs, Teachers, and Transcribers

by Nicole Gaines, Elizabeth Schaller, and Jeffrey Witt

The American Printing House for the Blind offers several resources to TVIs and transcribers to support locating and producing accessible formats on behalf of students who are blind or visually impaired. In this poster, we will introduce participants to three free resources that are managed by APH:

the National Instructional Materials Access Center, the Louis Database of Accessible Materials, and the Tactile Graphic Image Library.

Audio Description to Improve Textbook Accessibility for Social Studies Teachers with Visual Impairments

by Binur Tokac, Genc Osman Ilhan, and Mehmet Akif Cihan

This action research explores how audio description can enhance accessibility for social studies teachers with visual impairments working in inclusive settings. Participants will learn how audio-described materials supplement Braille textbooks, especially for visually complex content, and how audio description supports teachers' access to essential instructional information.

Cognitive Load and AT Training in Visual Impairments

by Sean Tikkun

This session presents concise results from an unpublished dissertation related to cognitive load and other cognitive factors related to instruction. The findings are theoretically applied to the unique demands of assistive technology instruction. The poster sessions seeks to provide professionals with both theoretical and data driven information to facilitate the design of future AT instruction.

The Impact of Postsecondary Education and Career Services on Competitive Integrated Employment for Adults Who Are Blind or Have a Visually Impairment

by Kanako Iwanaga and Sandra Bullins

This study examined how education and vocational rehabilitation services influence employment for 7,956 adults with blindness or visual impairment. Postsecondary education increased the likelihood of competitive employment, and personalized VR services such as counseling, job placement, short-term supports, and supported employment helped individuals obtain and maintain work. Findings highlight the complementary roles of education and VR services and the need to expand high-impact supports.

The Invisible Game: A review of intervention studies discussing the social and psychological impacts of participation in sports for individuals with visual impairments

by Jessica Smith

This literature review examines the social and psychological impacts of sports and physical activity (PA) for individuals with visual impairments. It addresses four research questions concerning participant characteristics, activities, necessary accommodations, and socio-psychological outcomes. Findings highlight participation gaps due to limited incidental learning and awareness. The review outlines how PA fosters social skills, confidence, and overall well-being.

Accreditation for Agencies and Schools for the Blind

by Elly du Pre and Paul Furthmyre

The presentation will explain the process of preparing a successful submission of materials supporting all the standards required for accreditation of an agency providing direct services, or a school providing services to individuals who are blind or low vision.

Involving Listeners and Musicians Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired in the Creation, Performance and Access to Live Jazz

by Nancy D Miller and Gerald "Jerry" Miller

The session will describe activities that enhance the enjoyment of live jazz music. This includes greater appreciation of the musicians and performance and recommendations for increased accessibility of the music venue. This example of inclusion of blind and visually impaired people's input in the creation of a new piece of music for a jazz ensemble can be generalized for professionals seeking opportunities for better involvement, access and jobs for blind and visually impaired people.

Seeing Beyond Despair: Addressing Suicide Risk Among Older Adults with Vision Loss

by Carlie Rhoads and Pris Rogers

Vision loss in later life can trigger grief, isolation, and loss of identity—factors linked to depression and suicide risk. This session examines the intersection of aging, vision loss, and mental health, offering inclusive, evidence-based strategies to integrate accessibility and sensory awareness into suicide prevention efforts for older adults.

Safety First: Advocating for Procedures Supporting Students Across School Sites

by Erika Fundelius and Lauralyn Randles

Natural disasters strike unexpectedly, and itinerant personnel face unique challenges travelling between sites. Emergency protocols for students with disabilities are often overlooked, creating gaps in safety and accessibility. This session explores collaborative and direct strategies to integrate ER preparedness into planning and highlights a teacher-prep assignment designed to build awareness.

Studying the Neural Basis of Braille Literacy and Numeracy

by Tessa McCarthy and Frances Mary D'Andrea

This session shares preliminary neuroimaging results from braille readers who viewed letters, words, and numbers. Findings show both shared and category-specific brain activation, revealing how meaning—not form—drives responses when indicators change. A braille-centric perspective highlights implications for literacy, equity, instruction, symbol design, and understanding reading and number processing in people who are blind or visually impaired.

4 Fam Frogs; A Family's Journey

by Kasey Hopper

In this session, I will show how 4FamFrogs uses authentic stories, humor, and accessible travel content to change perceptions of blindness. Participants will learn how social media can be a powerful tool for advocacy, teaching, and celebrating independence.

Advancing Tactile Graphic Literacy for Students with Visual Impairment: Current Research Trends,

Effective Strategies, and Future Directions

by Hisae Miyauchi, Tina Herzberg, Mayu Mori, and Erika Matsuda

In this poster session, we will: (1) highlight current research trends and existing knowledge in the field, and (2) introduce effective teaching tools used in Japan and the United States to support tactile graphic literacy. We identified a total of forty-four articles related to graphic literacy among students with visual impairments. The largest group of studies focused on teachers of students with visual impairments, examining their skills in creating tactile graphics, their instructional practices, and the challenges they face in teaching. An equally large number of studies investigated tools used for tactile graphics instruction, with almost all focusing on digital approaches to representing visual information. Nine articles explored students' skills, cognitive processes, performance, and perceptions when engaging with tactile graphics, while the remaining nine addressed topics such as intervention programs to strengthen tactile reading skills and criteria for quality in tactile graphics. Some of the tools we will introduce include a geometry drawing kit designed to optimize tactile perception and support coordinated two-handed manipulation, as well as a workbook routinely used in early primary grades to develop pre-graphic literacy skills before formal engagement with tactile graphics in academic subjects.

Ready! Set! Go! - A Summer Program for South Carolina Youth to Fill Their Transportation Toolboxes

by Tina Herzberg

We will share about two community-based programs for South Carolina youth focused on exploring transportation options used by active travelers who are BLV. Travelers received engaging O&M instruction, including using different transportation methods and building skills with street crossings. The program gave travelers the opportunity to build their independent living, technology, recreational, and social skills. Example activities will be shared in addition to pre-post program assessment data.

BREAKOUT SESSION 2 | 3:00 AM - 4:30 PM

The State of Our State: Workload, Burnout, and Experiences of TVIs and O&M Specialists in Tennessee

Presented by Rachel Schles, Madeline Chastain

This session presents the first two Tennessee "Visual Impairment Professionals Surveys" conducted in 2022 and 2024. Results highlight current needs from the perspective of TVIs, O&Ms, and district administrators. Average caseload size and student demographics will be discussed, as well as vision professionals' workplace burnout, and the impacts of the shortage of vision professionals. Through a snapshot of Tennessee, we will make connections to patterns in other states and our field at-large.

Partnering With Families: Supporting Preschool Transition for Children with Vision and Hearing Differences

Presented by Paige Maynard, Donna Carpenter

The EI to preschool transition is complex, especially for families of children with vision and hearing differences. This interactive session, featuring family and professional voices, directly addresses anxiety, unknowns, support, and hope. Attendees will gain a comprehensive toolkit of family-centered strategies and resources focused on supporting a successful and inclusive transition process for each child.

Access Technology in Action: Building Capacity in Blindness and Low Vision Technology through the AT Builders Project

Presented by Lacey Long, Cindy Williams, Renae Bjorg

This session highlights the AT Builders Project, a statewide initiative to increase awareness and confidence in assistive technology for students with blindness and low vision. Presenters will share collaborative strategies, outcomes, and practical examples that empower educators and specialists to assess, implement, and support access technology effectively.

Meet Glide, the intelligent orientation and mobility tool

Presented by Ellie Carlson, Amos Miller

Independent travel for the blind is at a turning point. This session explores how Glide uses robotics, real-time sensing, and a consumer-centred design to expand access beyond the reach of the white cane and without the inevitable heartbreak of guide dogs. We will share insights from pioneer users, discuss the societal and training implications of technology-led mobility, and highlight what this shift means for the future of orientation and mobility.

A Monarch for Every Moment: Live Demonstrations & Stories Across the Lifespan

Presented by Erin Sigmund, Sarah Gauer

Centering the lived experiences and accomplishments of Monarch users of all ages, this story-forward session will introduce students, educators, parents, and professionals whose "Monarch Moments" reshaped access at home, in school, and on the job. Blending tech demos and robust discussion, attendees will leave with a clear understanding of Monarch Projects, examples of real-world use cases, and the inspiration to consider their own "Monarch Moments."

Systems Change Priority 2: The importance of supporting and engaging in research

Presented by Nancy D Miller, Priscilla Rogers, Margaret Winn, Jason Eckert

Why is engaging in research so important?
The session will a) emphasize the importance and utilization of research b) encourage participation in research opportunities c) conduct research (when feasible) d) establish/increase the evidence base for the results/ outcomes of our work e) connect with associations/societies with doctoral candidates looking for research projects to focus on education and rehabilitation outcomes

Games and Puzzles to Increase Learning When Teaching the Nemeth or UEB Math/Science Braille Codes to Students of All Ages

Presented by Susan Osterhaus, Tina Herzberg, Sara Larkin

There is nothing better than a good game to motivate a student to learn something new. Did you know that there are many fun ways for students to learn braille, especially in STEM fields? Come and discover games and activities you can use when teaching Nemeth or UEB Math/Science braille codes. These can be played virtually or in person. Puzzles and games can positively impact a child's engagement while promoting critical thinking skills and math learning. Participants should come ready to play.

Managing Workload of Itinerant TSVIs and COMS: Preventing BurnouT

Presented by Rona Pogrund, Cecilia Robinson

Using a workload rather than a caseload approach provides a more accurate picture of what itinerant vision professionals do. Current data on itinerant TSVI's and O&M specialists' workloads will be reviewed; use of a validated workload analysis tool, the VISSPA, for documenting workload will be shared; and strategies to help advocate for more reasonable workloads will be discussed.

Unraveling O&M Standards: What Am I Teaching and When Will I Cover It?

Presented by Geri Darko

Complex curriculum standards often leave educators wondering "What is my student supposed to be able to do?" Unraveling these complex standards can mean the difference between splintered skills and generalized learning. In a partnership with Learning Systems Associates, MSDB wants to share the story of how they are unraveling complex O&M standards. The COMS will demonstrate how she is identifying learning objectives within each standard to maximize each learner's potential.

Sight Unseen

Presented by Rebecca Coakley

Set in Appalachian West Virginia, Sight Unseen follows blind and visually impaired teens navigating a world built for sight. Through summer adventures, daily challenges, and quiet courage, this poetic, character-driven film reveals a "vision" shaped by resilience, friendship, and the belief that blindness is another way of being. Filmed over a year, it follows five remarkable teens and their peers, powerfully challenging assumptions about ability, identity, and meaning.

Supporting the Transition from Cane to Guide Dog: Practical Strategies for COMS

Presented by Mike Goehring, Danielle Cuénoud, Melinda Angstrom

This session equips COMS with strategies to assess guide dog readiness, prepare clients for the transition to guide dog mobility, and support teams after graduation. Topics include evaluating travel skills and readiness, aligning expectations, and helping clients assess which guide dog program will best meet their individual needs.

Redefining Independence:Residential & Community Based Group Training for Older Adults

Presented by Frankie Ann Marcille, Cathleen McGuire

VISIONS' Adaptive Living Program empowers blind older adults through group-based training designed to reduce isolation and long waitlists. Combining residential and community-based sessions, participants learn practical skills in personal and home management, communication, financial literacy, assistive technology, mobility, meal planning, and recreation. This session will highlight program development, recruitment strategies, and outcomes.

Leadership Bootcamp: Building Confidence and Clarity in Your Leadership Journey (Part 2)

Presented by Joy Harris

In this second Leadership Bootcamp session, participants will analyze their leadership skills, identify growth areas, and build a personalized leadership development blueprint. Through interactive activities—skill mapping, strategy brainstorming, and a choice of planning tools—attendees will create a clear roadmap for their leadership journey.



BREAKOUT SESSION 3 | 3:00 AM - 4:30 PM

Structured Discovery: Empowering Learners and Expanding Instructor Capacity in Blindness Education

Presented by Kristen Sims

Structured Discovery Cane Travel (SDCT) is a methodology for O&M and Rehab Teaching that builds true independence and increases instructor capacity. By emphasizing non-visual skills, accountability, and problem-solving, it reduces long-term reliance on instructors and fosters adaptability. This session will use open dialogue to address misconceptions about SDCT and demonstrate how these methods, founded in learning theory, can bridge service gaps and help alleviate future instructor shortages.

Job Site Assessment Considerations for the Blind Rehabilitation Professional

Presented by Elyse Connors

An effective job site assessment for an individual with a disability includes the following key components: a detailed task analysis of the essential job duties, observation of the individual performing tasks in the real work environment, identification of functional needs and barriers, and the development and recommendation of appropriate solutions. This workshop presents a tool to help guide professionals through the assessment process, and work collaboratively to implement recommendations.

Inclusio: A One-Stop Shop for Finding and Creating Interoperable, Accessible Graphics

Presented by Kevin Hollinger, Steve Noble, Derrick Smith

Creating accessible graphics requires specialized tools and knowledge, extensive time, and significant resources. Inclusio, a one-stop shop, addresses these challenges, allowing users to create and share accessible graphics through multiple outputs with ease. Our end-to-end, AI-driven marketplace, open metadata format, and multimodal output systems spanning from tactile graphics to multimodal digital content, streamlines accessible content creation.

Money Without Barriers: Financial Planning for the Blind and Low Vision Community with HaloFi

Presented by Andrew Babin

Financial independence is one of the most overlooked dimensions of independence for people who are blind or have low vision. This session covers the essentials: how SSI and SSDI benefits work, how to prevent financial fraud, budgeting on fixed income, common financial mistakes, and what accessible financial tools, including HaloFi, look like when built for this community. Practical knowledge rehabilitation professionals can use with clients immediately.

Beyond Borders: What Travel in Japan and Indonesia Teaches Us About Global Accessibility

Presented by Sean Tikkun, Danene Fast

This presentation is designed to examine accessibility features and travel challenges experienced by individuals who are blind in Japan and Indonesia. The presenters share first-hand accounts of personal experiences in these countries, exploring how access is supported and restricted for travelers with visual impairments. The session is designed to highlight how international exploration can strengthen problem-solving, accessibility, and self-advocacy to create more inclusive environments.

Unlocking the Magic of Mathematics for Blind Learners

Presented by Klaus-Peter Hars

Discover a groundbreaking approach to inclusive math education for blind learners. This session explores how assistive technologies and smart tools like Magic Braille Numbers and Magic Math Tools empower students to engage with mathematics through touch, sound, and interaction. Participants will learn how to unlock thousands of free, accessible resources, fostering independence, confidence, and joy in learning while breaking barriers to true educational inclusion.

Braille Writing for the Modern Learner: New innovation with APH Braille Technology Team

Presented by Melisa Matthews

This session explores how emerging braille writing tools are transforming the teaching and learning of braille literacy. Participants will examine how modern design principles build on the strengths of traditional braillewriters while addressing current instructional challenges. Attendees will engage in practical activities, evaluate classroom and home-based applications, and learn strategies to integrate new braille technology to support learners across all ages and stages.

Rising From the Ashes - Life Lessons That Came From Tragedy

Presented by Faith Horter

After being burned over 90% of her body at 15 months of age & doctors telling her parents that if she lived, she would most likely be blind, deaf and/or mentally challenged, the author overcame the many physical and emotional hurdles. A great analyzer of "what works", the author developed some life lessons and guidelines to become a positive & successful individual. Join her as she shares this remarkable journey & get ready to be inspired by her story like so many other individuals have.

Evaluating Sensory Efficiency: Moving Beyond Sensory Channel Preference in the Learning Media Assessment Process

Presented by Loana Mason

Sensory preference does not equate to sensory efficiency. Thus, this presentation will share a tool that expands upon the Sensory Channels form to create a Sensory Profile that examines both sensory preferences as well as sensory inefficiencies. This new tool is designed to incorporate the complex access needs of sensorimotor learners as well as help provide more precise data for dual media users.

Digital Gaming for Children who are Blind: A Partnership with Bridge Multimedia, APH, and WNET Public Media

Presented by Greg Stilson, Wendy Sapp

Join Bridge Multimedia and APH to learn about digital educational games that are accessible for children who are blind or have low vision through auditory and tactile versions. Five accessible games are available for children who are blind or have low vision through PBS KIDS and one of these games has been adapted for tactile play on the Monarch. Find out where to locate accessible games and how to adjust settings on commercially available games to increase accessibility.

The Best of Both Worlds: Learning and Teaching Music Blind

Presented by Matt Weihmuller

This presentation will feature the experiences of Matt Weihmuller, a blind music instructor and saxophonist from Tampa, Florida. You will discover how he learned music as a young student, his positive and negative experiences, as well as the trials and tribulations he has encountered as a present-day music teacher of both blind and sighted students.

Learning Media Decisions for Students with Low Vision

Presented by Cindy Bachofer, Emily Leeper

"The Learning Media Assessment (LMA) is a critical document in guiding access decisions for a student's educational program. This session will focus on using LMA data to determine and implement the use of multimedia (e.g., print, braille, audio) for a student with low vision in the school setting, home and community who may or may not use print. The focus will be on applying LMA data, rather than instructions on how to write the LMA.
"

Breaking Barriers: Inclusion of Blind/Low Vision Youth in Career and Technical Education

Presented by Hilary Travers

Blind/low vision students remain underrepresented in career and technical education (CTE) classes. Drawing on a national survey and focus groups, this session highlights common accommodations, collaborative practices, and systemic supports linked to success. Participants will discuss case examples and leave with actionable strategies to improve access and equity in diverse CTE pathways.

AGENDA OVERVIEW

Morning Walk/Run *Sponsored by NW Association of Blind Athletes* ..... **6:00–6:45 AM**

Breakfast Buffet ..... **7:00–8:30 AM**

Professional Division and Interest Group Meetings ..... **7:30–8:15 AM**

AER Business Meeting ..... **8:30–9:30 PM**

Exhibit Hall Hours ..... **9:00–4:30 PM**

Breakout Session 4 ..... **10:00–11:00 AM**

Breakout Session 5 ..... **11:15 AM–12:15 PM**

General Session ..... **1:45–3:15 PM**

2026 INDUCTION CEREMONY FOR HALL OF FAME FOR LEADERS AND LEGENDS OF THE BLINDNESS FIELD

Come be a witness to a new chapter in our field's history! For the first time since the 2002 establishment of the Hall of Fame for Leaders and Legends of the Blindness Field, the induction of new members will take place at our AER International Conference!

Dr. Michael Bina, Hall of Fame Board Chair, will host the 2026 Induction Ceremony, beginning with a special look at the development of the Hall of Fame that resulted from a general session presentation at AER's 2000 conference in Denver. He will then officiate the formal induction of the 2006 members into the Hall's revered membership. The contributions of the three 2026 inductees will be recognized by their nominators and each will be formally welcomed into the respected assembly of our field's leaders and legends.

The 2026 inductees into the Hall of Fame for Leaders and Legends of the Blindness Field are:
Janet Morgan Barlow, M.S., COMS
Deborah A. Chen, Ph.D.
Penny Hartin, LLD

Conference attendees are invited to congratulate the new members of the Hall and their guests immediately following the ceremony.

Breakout Session 6 ..... **3:45–5:15 AM**

KEYNOTE SPEAKER



Dr. Michael Bina

THE HALL OF FAME FOR LEADERS AND LEGENDS OF THE BLINDNESS FIELD CHAIR

Initially joining the field of blindness and visual impairment as a certified TSVI and O&M specialist, Mike Bina quickly moved to administrative and leadership positions. Over his career, he has served in leadership roles at the Texas, Indiana, Hadley, Perkins, and Maryland schools for the blind. In each position, he emphasized management and advocacy for the unique needs of visually impaired students. Dr. Bina is known for his collaborative approach to leadership and his ability to foster inclusive environments. His work reflects a deep understanding of both human resources and educational administration, positioning him as an expert in navigating the complexities of these intertwined sectors. He is also proud to have served in the U.S. Army as a special forces airborne and underwater operations officer.

In AER's early years, Dr. Bina served as President of AER's international Board of Directors and was the energy behind the establishment of AER-Lift, AER's leadership training for chapter and division leaders. He helped form the of Council of Schools for the Blind (COSB) and served as its president. He has served as the USABA board of directors chair and has been honored by Lions Club International, VisionService Alliance, and COSB. From AER, he has received the Ambrose Shotwell Award, the C. Warren Bledsoe Award, and the Mary K. Bauman Award. The American Foundation for the Blind recognized his contributions with the AFB Migel Medal, and he was the recipient of the Wings of Freedom Awards from the American Printing House for the Blind. Northern State University and California State University Los Angeles named him as a distinguished graduate.

Currently, Dr. Bina serves as the Chair of the Hall of Fame for Leaders and Legends of the Blindness Field as well as the region president of the ICEVI North America Caribbean region. His passion extends to his role as president of the National Smokejumper Association, having been a U.S. Forestry Service smokejumper himself in his earlier life. Mike currently teaches O&M parttime in North Carolina public schools.

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Association for Education & Rehabilitation of the Blind & Visually Impaired

BREAKOUT SESSION 4 | 10:00 - 11:00 AM

O&M Division Strategic Plan Update

Presented by Raychel Callary, Alexa Poynor, Margaret Winn

Members of the O&M division executive committee will provide an update of the 2022-2027 strategic plan, which was developed to provide guidance for activities and focus for the division and executive committee. Join us to review what we have accomplished and upcoming division activities, including opportunities for involvement.

Beyond the BRI: Better Assessment of Braille Reader Progress

Presented by Frances Mary D'Andrea

The Basic Reading Inventory by Jerry Johns is a popular assessment used to determine reading levels for students who read braille. But there are other assessments we can use that can help us look at braille reading strengths and needs. This session will discuss targeted assessments that provide TVIs with better information about their students' reading.

Vision Services Severity Rating Scale (VSSRS) 2.0

Presented by Johanna Brutvan, Amanda English

The Vision Services Severity Rating Scale 2.0 (VSSRS 2.0) is a tool designed to assist the teacher of students with visual impairment in making suggestions for service time for students who are blind/low vision, birth to 26, including those with additional disabilities, regardless of their educational placement or service delivery model.

Cross-Cultural Insights on the Expanded Core Curriculum: Exploring Practices in Japan and the U.S.

Presented by Erika Matsuda, Dr. Hisae Miyauchi, Tina Herzberg, Mayu Mori

The Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) plays a critical role in supporting students with visual impairments. But how do other countries approach ECC-related skills? Do they follow the same nine areas, and are these skills implemented in the same way? Join us as we explore jiritsu-katsudo, a Japanese curriculum area. We will compare jiritsu-katsudo with the U.S. ECC and share insights from Japanese teachers, as well as from a former student who received jiritsu-katsudo instruction during their youth.

Empowering Educators: Inclusive Teaching Strategies and Models for Students Who are Blind or Visually Impaired

Presented by Elizabeth Sheehy

This session examines the teacher support systems in educational settings, with a focus on teacher experiences and perceptions of teaching students with visual impairments in the inclusive educational setting. During this time of TVI shortage we must prepare and educate the general and special education teachers. This session will demonstrate strategies that have been used through professional development in a suburban school district to prepare the general education setting for our students.

Guiding Growth: The Impact of supporting Teens through transition into adulthood in O&M Development

Presented by Hannah Jones, Brad Welling

Teens who are blind or have low vision are at a critical stage in developing the confidence, independence, and mobility skills necessary for successful transition into adulthood. Leader Dogs for the Blind Teen O&M program is designed to meet these needs. This session will provide an overview of the program's structure, goals, and unique opportunities; highlighting how targeted O&M instruction, peer interaction, and real-world travel experiences empower teens to build lifelong skills.

A Team Approach with Bioptic Use: From Pedestrian Skills to Pre-Driver Readiness

Presented by Cindy Bachofer, Marjie Wood

Students who meet the visual criteria to drive may have received limited O&M instruction as they often have visual measures above legal blindness and may be reluctant to use a mobility cane. Foundational concepts within O&M instruction (e.g., analyzing intersections) are key components of pedestrian travel and apply to pre-driver readiness. The presenters discuss basics of bioptic use, examples of visual criteria for drivers and activities for lessons/family time that emphasize these concepts.

Opening IDEA Data to All: A Tour of ADAPT for Low-Vision and Blind Users

Presented by Fred Edora, Johan Rempel

In this session, you will learn of the products and services freely available to states in order to improve accessibility to IDEA data, including people who are low vision and blind. This includes the implementation of a fully accessible open source tool called ADAPT (Accessible Data Analysis Publishing Tool). ADAPT is a public reporting solution to ensure that performance indicators related to infants, toddlers, and children with disabilities is fully accessible.

Digital-First Foundational Learning for Children with Blindness: A Structured Three-Phase Model for Early Education and Inclusion

Presented by Deepthi Telikicherla, Satish Tripathi

The Arunodaya (Sunrise) Program uses a structured three-phase digital-first model to deliver foundational learning for children with blindness in low-resource communities of India. Phase 1 builds core skills for daily living, literacy, and

numeracy. Phase 2 supports mainstream school inclusion. Phase 3 ensures follow-up. Reaching over 750 children, Arunodaya offers a scalable pathway to early education where traditional services are limited, and can be adapted across diverse global contexts.

UEB- Past, Present, and Future of a Unified Code: A Comprehensive Look at UEB Across ALL Content Areas

Presented by Rona Pogrund, Belinda Rudinger, Susan O'Brien

In this session, we will explore how Unified English Braille strengthens literacy across all content areas, including STEM. This presentation will highlight UEB's clarity, consistency, and flexibility, showing how a unified code supports learners, streamlines instruction, and empowers readers to move confidently through all academic areas, including math and science, and real-world materials.

What is New with Camp Abilities Around the Globe

Presented by Lauren Lieberman

Camp Abilities is an educational sports camp for children with visual impairments, blindness or deafblindness. It started in Brockport, NY in 1996. Since its inception it has spread around the US and the world. Camp also promotes all components of the ECC. There have been several new Camps, research studies, books, products, and programs developed since the last AER conference. The purpose of this presentation is to share what is new with the Camps in the US and abroad as well as future plans fo

Building Capacity for CVI Support: Educator Reflections and Data from a Multi-State Coaching Model

Presented by Stephanie Steffer, Dawn Anderson

Explore educator experiences and data from a multi-state coaching model focused on improving support for students with CVI. This session highlights how teacher confidence, strategy use, and perceptions changed over time. Participants will gain insights into what helped or hindered implementation, and how personal stories and measurable outcomes can guide future training and systemic support.

'Hogwarts is Hiring' behind every wand is a wizard...and a teacher who believed in them.

Presented by Tina Laffer

What if Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry had a posting for a new teacher...would you get the job? This imaginative session uses one student's journey as a case study in the positive outcomes in transformative teaching. By channeling strategies from Hogwarts professors, participants will explore how to stay anchored in students' postsecondary goals, despite regular chaos. Expect spells of inspiration, Muggle-friendly strategies, and interactive tools you can use to reawaken your magic.

Now Available on the HKNC Learning Center!

We're excited to announce that the **NCDB Teaching Children Who Are Deafblind: Professional Development for Educators** modules are now available through the HKNC Learning Center!

For a limited time, each course is available for just $5.00 and offers Continuing Education Units (CEUs).

www.helenkeller.org/professional-training

New Course Offerings

- **Preparing for Life After High School**
  Learn practical skills and strategies to help students who are deafblind and their families prepare for an active, meaningful, and successful transition to adult life.
- **The Impact of Deafblindness on Learning and Development**
  Gain foundational knowledge about how deafblindness affects learning and development and explore effective educational practices.
- **Early Intervention for Children Who Are Deafblind**
  Discover strategies that support communication, concept development, and early learning for infants and toddlers who are deafblind.
- **Communicating With Children Who Are Deafblind**
  Explore essential communication strategies and real-world examples for developing and expanding communication skills.

These courses are an excellent resource for educators, early intervention providers, related service professionals, and anyone supporting children who are DeafBlind.

HKNC Helen Keller NATIONAL CENTER for DeafBlind Youths and Adults

NCDB National Center on Deafblindness

BREAKOUT SESSION 5 | 11:15 AM - 12:15 PM

Shifting the Mindset from Success in High School to Access in College

Presented by Elaine Mara

This session clarifies the shift from IDEA in high school to ADA/504 in college for students with visual impairments. Drawing on the presenter's lived experience with visual impairment and work in disability services and as a TVI/OMS, it offers clear guidance on documentation, accommodations, self-advocacy, and independence skills. Attendees gain practical tools to support confident, informed college transitions.

Early Focus, 3rd Edition: The New and Improved Edition for the Early Childhood Professional

Presented by Rona Pogrund, DeEtte Snyder

The 3rd Edition of Early Focus is being published in July 2026. The editors of this book, who were also co-authors of most of the chapters, will lead a discussion around this pivotal resource. Session attendees will be introduced to the newest enhancements, highlights, structure of each chapter, and resources to enable new and experienced early childhood professionals to support the youngest learners who are blind or have low vision, including their families.

Low Vision Clinic Services, Device Prescription and Mainstream Technology

Presented by Cindy Bachofer, Kelly Lusk, Alisha Curtis, Rebecca Coakley, Tara Bowie

The importance and benefits of a clinical low vision evaluation for children and youth is poorly understood by the public. Panelists represent clinic models across the United States and share challenges and solutions in establishing and operating their program through economic changes, patient needs and service expansion.

Connecting with Learners through a Multisensory, Multicultural, and Multilingual Experiences

Presented by Annabelle Gonzalez, Patricia Camarillo, Cheryl Kamei Hannan, Danny Olvera, Xiomara Roman

Teachers of students with visual impairments and bilingual educators highlight strategies for incorporating multi-sensory experiences. A panel of presenters will touch upon adaptations for children's books and community fieldtrips using a culturally sustaining pedagogical approach. Presenters discuss how to draw on cultural and linguistic assets, points of access, and familiar frames of reference to select books aligned with specific language and literacy skills.

How to Teach the New Microsoft Outlook with JAWS, Narrator and NVDA: A Comparative Task Analysis

Presented by Sara Nappi, Aisha Hixon

This presentation provides a comparative task analysis of Windows screen readers, examining how users can effectively interact with the new Outlook interface compared to the classic version.

Unscripted Vision: Rewriting Media's Portrayal of Blindness

Presented by Stephanie Jones, Natashja Lusk

This session examines how blindness and visual impairment are portrayed in media, highlighting stereotypes, analyzing authentic representation, and exploring strategies to promote accurate, inclusive storytelling that shapes public perception and professional practice.

A new Technology Readiness Tool to identify student strengths and areas of need, and guide the development of available resources for technology and digital skills instruction

Presented by Michelle Gates, Alexandra Futty

Learn, Earn, and Prosper (LEAP) has implemented a technology readiness tool with students and we will describe the process, outcomes and best practices for its use. We will provide examples and Open Source resources for LEAP Connect programs which prioritize instruction and practice opportunities for each of the competencies included in the tool and share student experiences in programming.

Weather Brain: AI Supported Accessibility in Weather and Emergency Communications

Presented by Wendy Sapp

Discover how the Weather Brain prototype provides real time access to weather and emergency communication including wildfire maps, evacuation orders, other life-saving information in emergencies for all people, including those who are blind or have low vision. This session covers key insights from pilot studies on AI-generated emergency communication, user-focused projects assessing needs and interest, and the role of federal regulation and advocacy in driving accessible technology development.

Seeing Through the Eyes of the Patient

Presented by Charles Saccarelli

We work with the visually impaired, but do we really know what it's like to look through their eyes? This course gives a basic tour of the visual system, and will help you translate what you see on case reports to real life situations.

Manageable Strategies You Can Begin Using Now to Support Listening Skills in Children and

Students who are Blind and Visually Impaired

Presented by Maurice Belote

There is an increasing number of students entering our programs and caseloads who have complex needs that necessitate specific interventions and strategies to support these students to fully understand spoken language and environmental sounds and cues. There is no need to approach this with trepidation or assume that only high tech, expensive equipment can provide the necessary accommodations. There are many quick-to-implement strategies that help support the active engagement of these students.

Supporting Vulnerable Populations in School Emergencies: Practical Strategies for Inclusive Preparedness

Presented by Aaron Vanatta

This session takes an inclusive all-hazards approach to school emergency management, examining the additional steps needed to protect students and staff who are most at risk during natural, technological, or human-caused incidents.

Evolution, Impact, and Future of 3D Printing in Blind Rehabilitation

Presented by Benjamin Cutler

In this session you will understand 3D printing, why it is universally helpful, and where it may go in the future. You will gain knowledge of how 3D printing has impacted blind rehabilitation at the Vision Education and Rehabilitation Center at Florida State College at Jacksonville in Northeast Florida.

Bold Recruitment Strategies: National Marketing Campaigns to Attract New Professionals

Presented by Lee Sonnenberg, Kathleen Zeider

"The session will discuss
1. The need for and the thinking behind bold national strategies - what the field had been doing was not working.
2. The reason to hire the right expertise to implement the strategy.
3. The results of the PBS video
4. The results from the National Digital Ad Campaign after 30 months for the TSVI recruitment project and 8 months through June 2026 for COMS, CVRT, CLVT and CATIS. "



BREAKOUT SESSION 6 | 3:45 - 5:15 PM

Beyond the Buzz: Practical AI Workflows for Busy Professionals in Vision Education and Rehabilitation

Presented by Melisa Matthews

Artificial intelligence is increasingly present in education and rehabilitation. This session introduces AI as a professional support tool for lesson planning, communication, curriculum development, and transition planning for individuals who are blind or have low vision. Participants will learn a practical prompt-writing framework, explore real-world use cases, and gain strategies for using AI responsibly to save time while maintaining professional judgement and accessibility.

The Aging and Vision Loss Revolution Continues: AVLNC Challenges You to Become Involved

Presented by Mark Richert, Elly du Pre, Priscilla Rogers, Jason Eckert

The Aging and Vision Loss National Coalition has scored many wins over the past several years, but has a great deal of work left to do. Join this session to find out what we are currently engaged in and how you can get involved. Share your thoughts about the future of aging and vision loss in this country.

"I'll Do It Myself": Approaches to broadening the technology toolkit for students with cortical visual impairment (CVI)

Presented by Jonathan Graves

Students with cortical visual impairment (CVI) often face unique barriers to using print and digital materials. Drawing on case examples from the Pediatric VIEW program, this session shares CVI-specific assistive technology tools to support curriculum access. Participants will explore practical workflows that help educational teams align technology use with CVI principles and foster greater student independence.

Accessible Math in Action: Digital Math Demonstrations

Presented by Nicholas Leon

This session explores how modern assistive technologies are reshaping math accessibility for students who are blind or have low vision. Attendees will learn how tools like JAWS Math Editor, Desmos, MathPix, Monarch, and MathType can work together to create and access math content efficiently. The presentation will emphasize practical demonstrations that support K–12 students in both digital and tactile formats, helping educators design materials that foster independence, engagement, and success

Addressing the Transportation Needs of Young, Novice VI Students Who Want to Drive

Presented by Charles Huss

This 90-minute session will introduce what bioptic driving entails; updates regarding the current status of bioptic driving in the United States and available in-car service providers; how and which states are taking active roles in educating young novice driver candidates and their parents re driving; and a proposal(s) for integrating programs of pre-driver readiness training and adaptive in-car driver training at residential schools for the blind and visually impaired across the United States.

Growing Up With Confidence: How the Belt Cane Allows Incidental and Active Learning to Occur Naturally

Presented by Marjie Wood, Geri Darko

When children with visual impairments are first learning to walk on their own, instruction often begins by giving them a device to help them be safe. Safe mobility requires the integration of many skills, including motor control, balance and coordination, focus and attention, and understanding one's environment and one's relationship to it. The belt cane eliminates this sensory overload and can be the difference between self-initiated movement and learned helplessness.

Audio Description: An Aid to Literacy

Presented by Joel Snyder

Audio Description uses words that are succinct, vivid, and imaginative to convey the visual image that is not fully accessible to a significant segment of the population. This presentation focuses on the fundamentals of audio description and their applicability to building literacy and employment.

Prepping Clients for Guide Dog Travel: Practical and Informational

Presented by Hannah Jones, Meredith Bryde

In this presentation, you will learn how to provide a practical simulation of travel without tactile feedback that is helpful in preparing for guide dog travel, called a JUNO walk. We will also discuss how as a COMS you can help individuals you work with prepare for applying for and potential guide dog travel.

An Update to the Digital Math Skill Level Checklists to Prepare Students for Success

Presented by Susan Osterhaus, Tina Herzberg, Sara Larkin

Students with visual impairments need strong skills to access and produce increasingly complex digital math content. We updated our checklists which are organized in grade bands from Pre-K through high school for Tablets, Notetakers, Computers, and Calculators. We will also share

the new Manipulatives Checklists for PreK-grade 2, grades 3-5, and middle school students. TVIs can use the checklists to ensure students have the knowledge and skills needed in today's digital classroom. Input welcome.

Systems Change: Priority 3 Actively recruit and retain credentialed/certified trained specialized blindness/low vision professionals

Presented by Nancy D Miller, Margaret Winn, Cathleen McGuire

"Recruitment and retention of an adequate numbers of qualified professionals is key to high quality service.
Collaborate with the professional preparation programs/ connect AER Chapters to university programs
Assist with recruiting students for personnel prep programs and provide field work supervision
Outreach to college student potential professionals
Advertise and market the AER professions and professionals locally and nationally (use free Public Service Announcements PSA's/social media"

Rethinking DeafBlind Services for Birth–Three in Washington State

Presented by Mary Jessica Chandler, Emma Packard

Washington state is reimagining how we support our youngest DeafBlind learners by centering relationships, touch, and the wisdom of caregivers. This session will share a new mentorship/partnership model between Washington's DeafBlind program & Washington State School for the Blind's Birth to Five vision team, highlighting how statewide initiatives like Reflective Practice and Promoting First Relationships (PFR) are being woven directly into home visits and IFSP work.

Fighting culture, poverty, and family ties to help consumers find acceptance, independence, and dignity

Presented by Mary Beth Kelty, Toni Walls

In the Appalachian area, of Huntington, WV multiple cultural groups coincide. Poverty and family bonds tend to be some of the commonalities of these groups. Stubbornness tends to be another. Blindness can create a complete dependence upon family. Poverty, stubbornness, and/or familial ties often keep them from looking for solutions. When solutions offered are foreign, or unheard of, rejection of the solutions often follows.
This session will focus on finding ways to help clients reach acceptance

Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About eBraille But Were Afraid to Ask

Presented by Willow Free

Come discover how eBraille is opening new doors for readers and creators. Follow along as we explore how files can be created in Duxbury, BrailleBlaster, and APH's BRF-to-eBRL Converter, then enjoyed on the Monarch, other displays, or even in a browser. You'll see how eBraille makes braille dynamic, flexible, and surprisingly easy to create and use.





Stories on Shuffle

A Kentucky Host Night

Music, Bingo, Prizes, and Bluegrass State Fun

Spin the night away with us.

Music bingo — including rounds spotlighting blind musicians and a Louisville disco round — with Kentucky-made prizes for winners.

First 150 guests get a free drink ticket and light bites while they last.

Everyone is welcome. Come and go as you please — every song tells a story, so let's build the playlist together.

Saturday, August 1, 2026

6:00 to 9:00 PM

Tavern on Fourth

Fourth Street Live, Louisville, Kentucky

Hosted by the Kentucky AER Chapter and the KSB Charitable Foundation

In connection with the AER International Conference 2026

Accessible by design — braille and large-print bingo cards, songs called aloud, all welcome.

AGENDA OVERVIEW

Morning Walk/Run *Sponsored by NW Association of Blind Athletes* ..... **6:00–6:45 AM**

Breakout Session 7 ..... **8:00–9:30 AM**

Exhibit Hall Hours ..... **9:30–4:30 AM**

Breakout Session 8 ..... **10:00–11:00 AM**

Breakout Session 9 ..... **11:15 AM–12:15 PM**

General Session ..... **1:45–3:15 PM**

FAMILY STORIES ON THE IMPACT OF VISION LOSS AND BLINDNESS

This general session introduces us to the stories of two families whose life dynamics were altered by blindness or vision loss. In addition to their candid personal accounts, they will share their experience-based insights for professionals serving individuals with vision loss or blindness and their families. This session will also include the presentation of the Douglas C. MacFarland Award and the C. Warren Bledsoe Award.

Barbara Knighton, parent of a young man with low vision and current Vice Chair, Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities, will share practical insights and advocacy strategies she has developed through the many struggles and celebrations she and her family have lived together. For a senior-adult perspective, **Dan Norris**, Assistant Executive Director of the Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired, will moderate video clips in which **Moira and Dave LeDuc** share straightforward accounts of the impact Moira's progressive vision loss has had on their relationship, their daily lives, and their resilience in the face of the loss of independence for both of them.

Please come ready to open your heart and your mind to understanding in a new way the impacts that low vision and blindness have on families, a dynamic we often experience too little of in our professional roles, whether working with school age children or adults and their families.

Special Offer: Following the session, Barbara Knighton will be available for conversations with attendees who have questions or seek her counsel on family challenges they encounter in their professional roles.

Professional Division and Interest Group Forum ..... **3:15–4:15 PM**

Meet leadership, ask questions, and learn more about the new AER Professional Division and Interest Groups. https://www.aerbvi.org/aer-pdig/

Breakout Session 10 ..... **4:15–5:15 PM**

Kentucky Host Night Social ..... **6:00–9:00 PM**

Join the Kentucky AER Chapter and the KSB Charitable Foundation for an accessible evening of music bingo, prizes, refreshments, and community during the AER International Conference in Louisville on Saturday, August 1. Everyone is welcome to celebrate with themed music, Kentucky hospitality, and an inclusive atmosphere.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER



BARBARA KNIGHTON

TEXAS SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED (TSBVI) FAMILY LEADER

Barbara is a parent advocate who brings an honest, grounded voice to the realities of raising a child with significant needs. As a mother to a child with multiple disabilities, she draws from lived experience to explore the emotional highs and lows of caregiving, long-term planning, and navigating complex medical and educational systems. Her work blends personal reflection with practical insight, highlighting the importance of early intervention, strong partnerships, and community support. Through her advocacy, Barbara helps families feel less alone, more informed, and better equipped to move forward with confidence, resilience, and compassion—especially when the path ahead feels uncertain.

Barbara's current leadership roles are: Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities (TCDD) Vice Chair, Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI) Family Leader, and Bridgewood Farms Family Brigade Leader.

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Association for Education & Rehabilitation of the Blind & Visually Impaired

BREAKOUT SESSION 7 | 8:00 - 9:30 AM

Sustaining Partnerships: 5 Years of Pre-ETS at the Virginia Tech School of Architecture

Presented by Kathy Malone, Andrew Gipe-Lazarou

This session will discuss the "Blind Design Workshop", an annual residential Pre-ETS program organized for aspiring designers with vision impairment from across the state of Virginia. Its aim is to provide attendees with actionable references and recommendations for creating, building, and sustaining mutually-beneficial partnerships between VR agencies and schools of Architecture and Design.

Not All Models Are Created Equal: Exploring Inequities in State O&M Referral Systems

Presented by Tessa McCarthy, Dr. Justin Kaiser, Tina Herzberg

Participants will learn about the findings from a research study that examined O&M referral practices. Topics include what professionals considered when determining whether to refer a student for an O&M assessment, what professionals identified as the practices currently happening in their state, and what should be best practice. Participants will share their experiences and work as a group to develop a list of action items relevant to practice and future directions for research.

Learn What's New in the Nemeth Code and Also Recharge Your Skills

Presented by Susan Osterhaus, Sara Larkin

We will provide users with the most significant changes in the official new Nemeth Code rule book, refresh those parts of the code that have not changed, and provide resources that will assist them in learning and teaching the Nemeth Code, all while doing it in a fun and captivating manner.

The Screen Reader Lesson You Can Teach Tomorrow: JAWS, NVDA & ChromeVox Basics

Presented by Cody Laplante

Tired of screen reader sessions that drift without purpose? Many vision professionals feel inadequacy teaching JAWS, NVDA, and ChromeVox instruction, memorizing commands they can't apply, and struggling to document progress. This 90-minute hands-on workshop provides immediate relief with a structured lesson plan template and Eye.t Learning Portal access. You'll leave with a complete lesson ready to teach, including specific objectives, success criteria, and exact portal locations for instruction

Spread your Wings and Soar with Spreadsheets

Presented by Amanda Lannan, Donna Lee

With the new Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) in effect, ensuring digital accessibly is not only the right thing to do, but the law. Bring your laptop and learn how to edit and create accessible spreadsheets for users who are low vision and those who use screen readers.

3D Printing for Blind and Low Vision

Presented by William Adams

This session explores how 3D printing can expand access for people who are blind or visually impaired. Participants will learn the basics of subtractive and additive fabrication, with a focus on FDM printing, and discover how to design tactile maps, add Braille, use multi-material printing, and create practical tools that support mobility, learning, and daily independence.

Systems Change Priority 4: Provide/promote quality services based on best practices and standards

Presented by Nancy D Miller, Priscilla Rogers, Margaret Winn, Cathleen McGuire, Jason Eckert

What is the best way to promote quality services throughout the United States in every state? Utilize/ communicate existing standards from the AER Accreditation process internally across chapters/divisions/interest areas Push for state/national (RSA?) requirement for certified/ credentialed (i.e. nationally certified/ state licensed?) professionals Establish national minimum standards that are endorsed by AER and Allies (ACB? VSA? AFB?)

From Lessons to Action: Harnessing Authentic Advocacy Experiences to Strengthen Student Voice, Confidence, and Lifelong Self-Determination

Presented by Kirsten French

Self-advocacy is essential to independence and confidence. Through the lens of authentic guide dog advocacy scenarios, including rideshare and access denials, this session shows how leveraging personal advocacy builds self-determination, problem-solving, and communication, equipping participants with strategies to empower their students to set and own meaningful goals.

Texas Monarch Migration: A Statewide Journey Toward Multiline Braille Access

Presented by Dr. Donna Clemens, Erica Cairns, Belinda Fayard

Texas undertook a statewide rollout of 328 Monarch multiline braille devices, creating one of the largest deployments of emerging braille technology to date. This session shares our journey—what we built, what surprised us, and what we learned. We will highlight statewide coordination, student readiness data, our two-part professional development model, and communication with stakeholders. We will offer candid insights to help other professionals anticipate opportunities.

More than Manufacturing: The Modern Role of Lighthouses in Blindness Rehabilitation

Presented by Ryan Brown,Kerri Marczuk,Alicia Lansford

This session will explore how Lighthouse organizations and their partners are redefining what is possible by leveraging technology, expanding employment opportunities, and creating pathways to independence for individuals of all ages.

CHAMPION Evaluation Methods

Presented by Adam Wilton, Cheryl Kamei Hannan, Michael Tuttle

The Comprehensive Holistic Approach for Maximizing Performance and Independence using Optimal and Natural (CHAMPION) Evaluation Methods is an integrative assessment process of functional vision, sensory efficiency, learning media, technology use, and the expanded core curriculum. The CHAMPION model provides a framework for conducting assessments, including suggestions for selecting instruments and promoting a student-centered approach. Participants will learn about the importance of generating a

Increase Your Expanded Core Impact: Integrating ECC Practices Across Your Caseload

Presented by Robbin Clark

This session equips educators and O&M instructors with field-tested tools for daily ECC integration. Explore a variety of tools including an ECC inventory assessment tool, a "skills of the month" checklist, and the collapsed framework highlighting all nine domains. Engage in guided individual and group reflections to connect content to your caseload and leave with actionable strategies for team collaboration across diverse learning environments.

Unlocking Independence- SMART Technology Solutions for Wheelchair Users with Visual Impairments

Presented by Lindsey Sharpe

This course addresses the unique challenges faced by individuals with combined mobility and visual impairments who need a power wheelchair. Historically, safety concerns limited power mobility access for this population. Participants will explore how SMART wheelchair technologies—such as obstacle detection, collision avoidance, and drop-off protection—enhance safety, confidence, and independence for these users.



BREAKOUT SESSION 8 | 10:00 - 11:00 AM

Seeing Ourselves Too: Preventing Burnout and Promoting Mental Health Among Vision Professionals

Presented by Carlie Rhoads

Vision and deafblindness professionals give deeply of themselves—but sustaining that care requires attending to our own well-being. This session explores burnout prevention, resilience, and mental health strategies grounded in research and reflective practice. Attendees will gain practical tools to build balance, set boundaries, and foster a culture of compassion and sustainability within the field.

Walking surface change detection with the long cane: Factors that affect surface texture discrimination

Presented by Dae Kim

The purpose of the presented studies is to examine the biomechanical and ergonomic factors that affect walking surface texture discrimination with the long cane. Participants correctly identified the rougher surface on a greater percentage of trials with a smaller tip than with a larger tip. The texture discrimination with the three different handles was similar. The findings of the study may help cane users and orientation and mobility specialists select appropriate cane tips and handles.

Getting Started: An Essential Guide to Living with Blindness or Low Vision

Presented by Priscilla Rogers

The APHConnectCenter VisionAware offers a free Getting Started Guide — tips for adults new to vision loss. The booklet is available in large print and accessible pdf versions online, as well as in English and Spanish. This presentation will review the new version just hot off the press and how to use it with consumers and family members. The presenter will also discuss updates to VisionAware and their relevance to the field as well as solicit feedback.

Plug In, Power Up, Braille On! Meet Paige Connect

Presented by Melisa Matthews, Jennifer Brooks

Page Connect transforms a Perkins-style braille writer into a digital tool by sending braille instantly to a phone, tablet, or computer. With real-time feedback, audio cues, and engaging online lessons, it supports learners, teachers, and families by connecting traditional braille writing with modern, interactive technology.

A Walk Through the Revised Orientation and Mobility Severity Rating Scale

Presented by Sara Cruchelow, Amanda English

The revised Michigan Orientation and Mobility Severity Rating Scale (O&MSRS) is a free online tool to guide professionals in determining appropriate service time recommendations for students receiving orientation and mobility services. Join us to learn how to use the new O&MSRS - Revised!

Solving the Community Outreach Conundrum

Presented by Jennifer Ottowitz, Kendra Farrow

With busy schedules and already large caseloads, how and why should you do community outreach? Raising awareness, sharing information, and making connections in the community can have a lasting impact. Join us as we share stories highlighting effective strategies and benefits of outreach efforts, along with exciting resources to help you solve the conundrum of how to fit in outreach activities and get excited about outreach goals.

Giving Students a Voice: Self-Advocacy Training for Students with Visual Impairments to Increase Confidence, Independence, and Self-Determination

Presented by Stephanie Jones, Kelly Lusk, Mindy Koehne

This session will provide information on self-advocacy training and practice for students who are blind and visually impaired. Through personalized goal setting, students learn to successfully self-advocate and increase their independence, confidence, and self-determination skills. Data show that both parents and students see value in these skills as well as improvement in skill areas after attending programming and learning the strategies and techniques.

Beyond the Direct Service Block: Embedding Vision & O&M Goals Into Everyday Routines for Students With Multiple Disabilities and Complex Learning Needs

Presented by Kara Hecht

This session explores practical ways to embed TVI and O&M goals into daily routines for students with multiple disabilities. Participants will learn how to identify natural opportunities across the school day, improve collaboration with classroom teams, and build consistent role-release practices so vision and mobility skills are reinforced even when specialists are not present.

Confidence Through Challenges: Helping Students Own Their Tech Solutions

Presented by Jennifer Wenzel, Julie Hapeman

""Easy is the enemy of independence." This powerful reminder captures the challenge many students who are blind/low vision face when technology issues arise. While the temptation is strong to step in quickly, true

empowerment comes when educators, paraprofessionals, and peers foster problem-solving rather than provide instant solutions. Join us to reimagine troubleshooting not as a barrier, but as a pathway to empowerment, capability, and lifelong confidence.

Creating Mini-Museums and Adapting Tactile Art Exhibits Using 3D Technology and Non-Traditional Materials for Blind and Visually Impaired Children

Presented by Hanna Demchuk

This presentation explores innovative methods for making art fully accessible to blind and visually impaired children through the creation of tactile mini-museums and adapted exhibits. The session highlights the use of non-traditional materials and modern technologies, including 3D printing, to reconstruct artworks in a tactile, perceivable format. Participants will learn how tactile museum environments support sensory development, orientation, conceptual understanding, and creative expression f

Enhancing Independence for Children age 11 through 17 with Visual Impairments through Guide Dog Partnerships: The Mira Foundation USA Model

Presented by Bonnie Archibald

Discover how Mira Foundation USA provides guide dogs to children ages 11-17 with visual impairments. Learn about candidate guidelines, the comprehensive evaluation process including O&M skill assessment, and the guide dog training methodology. Explore the partnership with Foundation Mira Canada and the month-long guide dog school experience.

The Voices of Orientation and Mobility Specialists who Instruct Individuals with DeafBlindness

Presented by Phoebe Okungu, Dr. Laura Bozeman, Nora Griffin-Shirley

The session will discuss unique instructional strategies and resources to better meet travel needs of individuals with DeafBlindness. The orientation and mobility specialists who serve this population were interviewed stressed the importance of modifying the O&M curriculum for people with DeafBlindness.

Cooking with Confidence: Adaptive Strategies for a Friendly Kitchen

Presented by Kevin Hollinger, Laura Gierer

Cooking with Confidence: Adaptive Strategies for a Friendly Kitchen explores how to adapt and manage a kitchen using no, low, and high-tech solutions. Discover various labeling systems—Braille, tactile, auditory, symbolic, large print, and more—to create an accessible and user-friendly kitchen for individuals with a VI. This session is based on the programming of the Summer Orientation & Mobility and Adapted Living Resource Program (SOAR). Join us and learn how to make cooking more inclusive!



BREAKOUT SESSION 9 | 11:15 AM - 12:15 PM

The Real Talk: CVI Story: Designing Social Opportunities for Teens with CVI

Presented by Francesca Crozier-Fitzgerald

Individuals with CVI are at great risk of missing access to social experiences, including cues that could help navigate social situations and frame social responses. In the first CVI-specific peer advocacy social group, "Real Talk: CVI," teens across the US find what they've been seeking from their other networks (clubs, teams). This presentation shares how through a healthy balance of intentional design and exploration it answers a unique request by teens with CVI, looking to connect.

Accessibyte for Educators and AT Specialists: A Complete Overview of Accessible Learning and Digital Productivity Apps

Presented by Joe Jorgenson

Accessibyte offers a full online platform of accessible apps for typing, braille, study skills, math, games, and digital productivity., in addition to Windows-based all-in-one solutions. This session introduces Typio, Braillio, Quick Cards, Study Pack, Math Cards, Accessibyte Arcade, and Accessibyte Studio. Educators and AT specialists will learn how to integrate the Accessibyte apps to support learning, independence, and engagement.

Implementing the Rosen Method in Orientation and Mobility Practice

Presented by Amy Campbell

Precise mobility technique relies on proprioceptive awareness, yet this foundation is often overlooked. This session introduces a new APH Hive online course featuring the Rosen Method, a structured approach that helps O&M Specialists identify proprioceptive limitations and apply targeted intervention to improve movement accuracy. Participants will preview key content, see how it applies in school and rehabilitation settings, and learn how to enroll when the course launches in August 2026.

New Tools, New Tales: How the National Library Service Uses Technology to Keep Blind and Low-Vision Individuals Reading

Presented by Claire Rojstaczer,Zhi Huang

The National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled (NLS), a part of the Library of Congress, has been providing free reading material for blind and low-vision individuals for more than ninety years. Come learn about service for your students and clients through its newest offerings, from the My Talking Books smart speaker skill to the DA2 audiobook player, released in 2025, and find out where NLS is headed with both its audio and braille offerings.

Seize the Dot: A Comprehensive Approach to Promoting Braille Across Programs and the Community

Presented by Cathleen McGuire

Seize the Dot presents a comprehensive approach to expanding Braille awareness, instruction, and confidence across programs and the broader community. This session highlights strategies to build staff skills, engage participants of all ages, educate vocational rehabilitation counselors, and support families through targeted training. The initiative also includes social media outreach, stand-alone Braille instruction, and annual Braille celebrations for seniors, youth, and families.

Prison Braille Programs: Evaluating Productivity, Challenges, & Possible Solutions

Presented by Jayma Hawkins, Christine Genovely, Tom Winton

More than 30 states operate correctional programs where incarcerated persons learn to transcribe braille, create tactile graphics, and produce accessible materials for schools and agencies. This session introduces the National Prison Braille Network, supported by the American Printing House for the Blind, and highlights findings from the first nationwide evaluation of these innovative initiatives.

Safe Streets in Virtual Worlds: Teaching Navigation Skills Through VR

Presented by Pamela Beach, Ali Brian, Lauren Lieberman

In this talk, we will explore how emerging technologies—specifically virtual reality (VR)—can extend the reach of Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS) and enhance traditional mobility instruction. COMS are highly trained professionals who teach individuals with VI how to navigate their environment safely, confidently, and independently. COMS play a pivotal role in empowering youth with VI to navigate their environments safely and independently.

More than Machines: Assistive Technology (AT) Training Trials for Students with Visual Impairment in Mainstream Schools in Singapore

Presented by Jessica Ng, Adalyn Heng

This session presents two applied projects supporting students with visual impairment in Singapore's mainstream schools. Partnering with specialised organisations, we delivered AT training programmes for primary and secondary students using the SETT framework and the Expanded Core Curriculum principles. The projects built student skills, raised school awareness, and strengthened family engagement. We discuss the collaborative approach used, outcomes, and transferability to other contexts.

All Aboard Maker Mondays: Full STEAM Ahead Into the ECC

Presented by Loana Mason, Jeff Killebrew

Every Monday since August 2024, all students at the New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired have been fortunate to participate in a series of collaborative, inquiry-based STEAM projects based on the Maker Movement and experiential learning theories. Not only did students demonstrate an increase in their Core Curriculum knowledge, but they showed noticeable gains across the ECC.

The Power of Simple Practices: Mindfulness & Yoga for a Healthier Future

Presented by Menely Hogan

Discover practical mindfulness strategies that can be used in the classroom to help students strengthen focus and manage anxiety. This session also introduces audio described yoga as an accessible movement practice that supports whole body learning. Educators will gain tools for helping students build flexibility, increase body awareness, and develop muscle strength. These simple & purposeful activities can be woven into daily routines and can support students' well-being throughout their lives.

CVRP's Institutes of Learning: An Innovative Approach to the Expanded Core Curriculum

Presented by Ellen Blaydes

CVRP's Institutes of Learning: An Innovative Approach to the Expanded Core Curriculum will focus on how to build programs that build independent and job ready young adults. Through Institutes of Learning (IOLs), we address ECC skills that students need to bridge the gap and build independence-in an effort to prepare them for life after high school. Giving our students real world and meaningful instruction through experiences is critical to preparation for adulthood.

Choose Your Own Adventure, Applying Adult Learning Theory to Guide Client Decisions

Presented by Jennifer Ottowitz, Kendra Farrow

Adult learners have prior experiences, personal preferences, targeted goals, and a desire to help plan their services. Recognizing these factors, professionals can identify common intersections in the service story where informed choice can be encouraged. Intersections include assessment, establishment of rapport, provision of information, and evaluation. Implementation of adult learning principles along with objective information can guide clients in choosing their own successful adventure.

Using the Oregon Project for Ongoing Assessment: Practical Strategies for TVIs and Teams

Presented by Brooke Painter

This session shows how the Oregon Project Assessment can serve as a practical tool for ongoing evaluation of children who are blind or visually impaired. Participants will learn to collect and interpret meaningful data, transform results into targeted IEP goals and objectives, and embed continuous assessment into everyday routines. The session also covers strategies for ongoing consultation with teams so data-driven decisions guide instruction. Attendees will leave with clear, actionable methods



BREAKOUT SESSION 10 | 4:15 - 5:15 PM

A Novel Framework for Automated Accessibility and Compliance in Education

Presented by Hari Prasath Palani, Joyeeta Mukherjee, Nicholas Giudice

Schools and universities struggle to make diverse materials accessible across many file types, tools, and LMSs. In this session, we will share how MorfDocs unifies this process and helps reduce remediation time and costs by using automated workflows that handle diverse file types and LMS integrations, enabling teachers and TVIs to generate accessible materials in real time and provide students with faster, personalized access to the content, all while meeting compliance requirements.

Assistive Technology for Individuals with Cerebral Visual Impairment: A CATIS Framework for Assessment, Instruction, and Exploration

Presented by Lacey Long, Dawn Anderson, Tara Bowie

This session explores the intersection of Cerebral Visual Impairment (CVI) and Assistive Technology (AT) through the lens of a Certified Assistive Technology Instructional Specialist (CATIS). Participants will learn how CVI characteristics inform AT assessment, configuration, instruction, and exploration. Evidence-based strategies and practical tools will be shared to optimize visual access and communication outcomes for individuals with CVI across educational and rehabilitation settings.

From Eligibility to Employment: Understanding Vocational Rehabilitation Services for Individuals Who Are Blind or Have Low Vision

Presented by Karma Marshall, Niki Outen

This session offers a practical overview of how Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services support individuals who are blind or have low vision from eligibility to employment. Participants will explore the VR process, counselor–consumer collaboration, and key training and supports provided by the South Carolina Commission for the Blind and similar agencies nationwide.

Accessible Gamified Learning for Blind and Low Vision Students

Presented by Jennifer Wenzel, Jason Martin

Blind and low vision students often have fewer chances to take part in classroom games that build skills and strengthen peer relationships. This session explores accessible approaches to gamified learning and highlights examples from current APH tools that support shared play, concept development, and social connection. Participants will see how game-based activities can create inclusive learning environments and leave with practical ideas they can use immediately.

From Cradle to Cane: Addressing Aging and Vision Loss Across the Lifespan

Presented by Priscilla Rogers, Carlie Rhoads

Vision loss is a lifelong experience, not confined to one age group. This session examines how early intervention, education, and rehabilitation shape long-term independence and well-being. Attendees will explore data-driven strategies to connect systems across the lifespan, fostering collaboration between education, rehabilitation, and aging services to support thriving at every stage of life.

Encouraging Communication and Routine Participation in Children with Significant Disabilities, Including Visual Impairment and Deafblindness

Presented by Jessicia Klenk

This presentation shares a book project for children who have significant disabilities, providing ways for professionals and family members to learn how to read the child's cues, find ways to motivate them to communicate, and to more fully engage with their environment. All done in a positive way, focusing on what the child can do and what more is possible.

Mentoring Matters: Building a Statewide Program to Support and Retain TVIs and O&Ms

Presented by Alisha Curtis, Kay Rhode

Join this session to discover how a structured mentoring program can strengthen professional growth, retention, and confidence for TVIs and O&Ms. Learn how to build and sustain a program and community that connects experienced mentors with new professionals, fostering collaboration, skill development, and shared support. Explore practical strategies, proven benefits, and actionable steps to create a thriving network that enhances job satisfaction and workforce stability.

Teaching O&M with no Vision: Rethinking What It Takes to be a COMS

Presented by Brad Blair, Laurel Henry

Laurel and Brad discuss their strategies for assessing and teaching as totally blind COMS. In this session, they combine their experience teaching everywhere from the city streets to the Rocky Mountains, and they talk about every aspect of O&M from becoming a COMS, to teaching magnification, to teaching in places they've never seen before. Laurel and Brad emphasize the value of alternative strategies for teaching, and they discuss blindness as lived experience that adds value to their work.

Mentorship in Motion: The Mutual Benefits of Mentoring or Supervising New VI Professionals

in the Field

Presented by Dr. Heather Munro, Beverly Jackson

Mentoring emerging VI professionals offers TSVI and COMS significant benefits, including strengthened leadership, deeper expertise, and reflective practice. Supervising interns supports the future of the field, promotes best practices, and enhances professional recognition. Mentors gain personal fulfillment, meaningful connections, and exposure to new strategies while building supervisory experience that enriches both daily practice and long-term career growth.

Dancing Dots, Accessible Music for VI Musicians and their educators: What's Old but maybe Still New to You and What's actually New to Everybody

Presented by Bill McCann

For over 30 years, Dancing Dots has created tools that help blind and low-vision musicians read, write, and learn music. Educators can quickly produce braille, magnified, or spoken music materials. Learn how braille music differs from print, how much magnification is possible, who should learn braille music and when, and what a "talking braille score" is.

Writing for the Practice Journal: The New RE:view

Presented by Dr. William Wiener, Mary Nelle McLennan

This session will prepare AER members to write and submit manuscripts to The New RE:View. It will describe the various types of articles and will provide information on what sections need to be included in each type of article. The session will also provide guidance on how to submit the article to the journal.

Early Braille Literacy Curricula: Insights, Strategies, and Shared Perspectives

Presented by Sara Lee, Rachel Bishop

Developing early braille literacy curricula requires balancing research, classroom realities, and the needs of both teachers and emerging readers. Using Building on Patterns: Kindergarten as a case example, this session will explore approaches to structuring early braille instruction and share strategies for implementing a comprehensive program. Participants will be invited to share their stories—what works for them, challenges they face, and innovations they envision for future materials.

Stories of Equitable Access: Leveraging Braille Workflow Practices to Redefine Material Preparation for CVI

Presented by Jonathan Hooper

Just as braille users require materials designed for tactile access, learners with CVI require academic materials that account for their functional vision. Practices exist to ensure the preparation of braille materials, but similar practices for developing CVI-accessible materials do not exist. Using stories from the field, we will explore parallels between braille transcription and the adaptation of individualized materials for learners with CVI and offer practical and theoretical solutions.

AGENDA OVERVIEW

Morning Walk/Run *Sponsored by NW Association of Blind Athletes* ..... **6:00–6:45 AM**

Breakout Session 11 ..... **8:30–9:30 AM**

Breakout Session 12 ..... **9:45–10:45 AM**

General Session ..... **11:00 AM–12:30 PM**

SHARING THE POWER OF OUR COMMUNITY

Our final session of AER's 2026 international conference will include the presentation of the Alfred Allen Award, then our time together concludes as **Mary Nelle McLennan** leads us through a lively look at how our stories can, indeed, impact our work and our future. The conference will be capped off by a thoughtful address from incoming President **Chris Tabb** who will share his vision and hopes for the future of our association. A send-off message by Executive Director, **Lee Sonnenberg**, will close the conference and open AER's next biennium.

Footnote Address: ***"Do Tell! The Power of Stories in Our Professional Practice"*** **Mary Nelle McLennan**, Chief Executive Editor of The New RE:view—A Journal of Practice

Stories surround us! They come in all varieties and happen naturally every day. Our stories—your stories—carry a universal power that can magnify our professional impact and our personal commitment in ways we may not recognize. Mary Nelle's "DO TELL!" address is an interactive session that illustrates the use of story as a tool for learning, growth, and change. Her remarks balance ideas and information, insight and participation, and of course—humor. We will begin with a brief look at the age-old power of story and the rationale for folding it into our professional practice. Sprinkled throughout the session, attendees will engage in story events illustrating how storytelling and storysharing can be integrated into our work with all ages, levels, and roles. Along with Mary Nelle, attendees will explore how we can effectively weave story-strategies into instruction, counseling, relationships with peers, families, and administrators, and into our own introspection. Naturally, we will share a few stories of our own!

Presidential Message: ***"To Plant a Garden"*** **Christopher Tabb**, AER President, 2026–2028

In his inaugural address, incoming AER President Chris Tabb will present an analogy of AER as our professional garden. He will share his experiences and insights for ways AER sustains and nourishes us as professionals, allowing us to grow in our practice and our potential. He will echo our responsibility to cultivate the continual progress of our profession and to seek and welcome new members. As he assumes the role of AER President, Chris will reinforce his deep conviction that we, as a community working together, can continue to move our profession forward, yielding an abundant harvest of success and opportunity for those we serve.

Closing Thoughts: Lee Sonnenberg, AER Executive Director

KEYNOTE SPEAKER



MARY NELLE MCLENNAN

CHIEF EXECUTIVE EDITOR, THE NEW RE:VIEW–A JOURNAL OF PRACTICE

Always a teacher at heart and with her M.A. in vision studies from Peabody College, Mary Nelle McLennan taught children for 15 years at the Tennessee School for the Blind before moving to the American Printing House for the Blind (APH). In her 33-year tenure at APH, she played many roles including Vice President of Products and Services and lastly retiring as Executive Advisor to the APH President.

For more than five decades, Mary Nelle has been active throughout the vision field in state, national, and international arenas. She served three terms as a member of AER's international Board of Directors, multiple terms on AER Chapter boards, and has been involved in numerous national and international advisory boards and leadership positions. She is currently in her 19th year as a representative to the Braille Authority of North America and has served several terms as its Vice Chair.

A skilled facilitator, she is known for her lively speeches and workshops and her practical approach to strategic planning. Her energy and contributions have been recognized with AER's prestigious Mary K. Bauman Award and AER's 2022 Douglas C. MacFarland Award for leadership and contributions in the field of blindness and visual impairments. In 2008, AER acknowledged her 16 years of creating and publishing the Springboard column in RE:view with a C. Warren Bledsoe special recognition.

Mary Nelle's newest endeavor—The New RE:view (TNR)—has spanned the period from early 2019 to the present As one of the seven members of the development team, she worked to bring the idea of a new journal to reality. Now, as TNR's Editor in Chief, she leads its Editorial Board and coordinates the journal's publication.

The widow of Dr. Richard Welsh, a fellow vision-field professional, Mary Nelle resides in Pittsburgh, PA, and at her traditional family home near Memphis, TN.

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BREAKOUT SESSION 11 | 8:30 - 9:30 AM

Oh Where, Oh Where Has Accessibility Gone? Finding What Is and Isn't Accessible About AI for People with Disabilities

Presented by Alyssa Shock

An American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) survey of 1,700+ participants, including 1,070 people with disabilities and 373 blind and low-vision respondents, found that AI is widely used in employment, education, and daily life, including as assistive technology, yet it also introduces accessibility barriers. This session shares findings on where accessibility is and is not found in AI, highlighting what BLV users and other PWD encounter in education, workplaces, and AI platforms generally.

"SENSE"-able Ways to Build Tactile Literacy Skills

Presented by Karen Poppe

This session will present "sense-able" materials and strategies to cultivate a young child's tactile literacy skills within purposeful contexts. Important tactile skills include systematic scanning, spatial understanding, shape and texture discrimination, transition from 3D objects to 2D displays, understanding perspective, familiarity with tactile graphic methods, and creation of tactile graphics.

Dots to Devices: Building Braille Literacy from Early Learning to Digital Mastery

Presented by Rachel Bishop, Melisa Matthews, Mr. Bobby Fulwiler

This session explores how learners progress along the braille literacy continuum, from early tactile readiness to advanced braille writing with digital tools. Attendees will engage with APH products that support each stage, including tactile readiness, reading and writing skill development, and refreshable braille integration. Participants will leave with strategies and a practical framework for guiding learners of all ages toward confident, independent braille literacy.

Farmer Noah- a System for Training Cognitive O&M Skills

Presented by Christopher Hekimian

The session will introduce the Farmer Noah system for cognitive O&M training. The Farmer Noah system supports the training and reinforcement of the three cognitive skills of: detecting non-visual cues in the environment; using those non-visual cues to make detailed and accurate mental maps, and; keeping track of one's position and orientation relative to the mental maps and surroundings.

Enhancing Math Accessibility: Demonstrations of APH's Latest Tools for Blind and Low-Vision Learners

Presented by Li Zhou

Students with visual impairments face challenges in learning math. This session highlights new APH products that support accessible instruction in arithmetic, number lines, coordinate systems, and graphing. An APH developer will demonstrate four tools—Geometric Drawing Stencils, Cedric's Cartesian Quest, Cosmic Number Lines, and Creacube—and share practical ways to use them with K–12 learners who are blind or have low vision.

Beyond the Braille Curriculum: Using High-Interest Books to Strengthen Literacy, Engagement, and Independence

Presented by Stephanie Davis

Braille readers often receive instruction limited to structured curricula, leaving them disengaged from authentic reading. This session shows how high-interest books can boost motivation, fluency, and comprehension. Participants will learn to select texts, adapt materials, and use simple routines that strengthen literacy. A case example and practical strategies will demonstrate how student-centered book choices can transform braille instruction.

Navigating your way to independence. GPS apps for the blind. Do not leave home without it

Presented by Mike May, Lauralyn Randles

This presentation will cover the common elements of GPS devices as well as the currently available products and their individual characteristics. We will touch on how the accessible GPS tool works in conjunction with AI and human navigation assistance. After 26 years, accessible GPS with its detailed verbosity remains critical for independent travel; the apps and devices have simply gotten smaller and more powerful. While route planning is a part of many accessible GPS apps, the core features."

Centering Blind/Low Vision Voices: Authentic Youth Partnership in Research and Resource Development

Presented by Hilary Travers, Michele Schutz, Katerina Kirbaba, Emily Lanchak

EMPOWER VI elevates B/LV voices through a youth advisory board, employment of a young B/LV professional, and co-designed resources. This session shares strategies to authentically engage B/LV individuals—beyond tokenism—in research and development, with discussion on building meaningful, youth-driven partnerships.

The Rosen Method: Teaching proprioception facilitation as part of a federal training grant

Presented by Tessa McCarthy, Amy Parker, Robert Wall Emerson

This session will briefly describe the Rosen Method for assessing proprioception deficits in learners with visual

impairments and the process for facilitating correction of those deficits. The main focus of this presentation, however, is how the Rosen Method was infused in the activities of a federal training grant and what the projected outcomes of those activities are.

Shifting Profiles in Deafblindness: Understanding Rising Genetic Syndromes (Usher, CHARGE) and Supporting Students

Presented by Carlie Rhoads

Recent Deafblind Child Count data show an increasing number of students who have genetic syndromes, such as Usher and CHARGE. Although these students' capabilities shine bright, they face sensory access challenges that are often misunderstood or overlooked. This session examines shifting population trends, explores the unique learning and communication profiles of these students, and provides practical strategies to ensure they have meaningful access and participation across educational settings

How to Train Your AI Dragon: Pilot Studies on a Generative AI Model to Demonstrate Learning Among Children with Blindness and Low Vision

Presented by Wendy Sapp

AbstractDiscover how the WISER (Ways to Inquire, Solve, Express, and Reflect) prototype transforms inclusive education. This session highlights pilot projects where AI-powered generative prompting supports learning, helping children with and without blindness or low vision deepen understanding and demonstrate knowledge. Learn how WISER fosters engagement, promotes equity, and enhances learning outcomes, while exploring innovative AI approaches that empower diverse learners and bridge educational gaps.



BREAKOUT SESSION 12 | 9:45 - 10:45 AM

Potential Use of Foundations Assessments in Braille Brain

Presented by Cheryl Kamei Hannan

The online Braille Brain Foundation Assessment tools are in a field-testing and validation stage. These tools are being developed to be used in diverse ways to evaluate learner strengths and areas of need. Data may be used to shape learner goals, instructional programing, and strategies. Join us to learn more and how you can help shape the future of this tool.

Teaching Low Vision Computer Accessibility Tools to Resistant Learners

Presented by Cody Laplante

Your student needs magnification but refuses to use it. Stop fighting. This workshop transforms adversarial relationships into collaborative partnerships through the Three Indicators framework, a student-driven assessment preserving their authority while addressing access barriers. Practice with Windows accessibility features, then create an action plan with exact language for your most resistant student.

Braille for Every Language: Partnering With Indigenous Communities to Build Accessible Literacy Systems

Presented by Autumn Booths-Speer

This session focuses on the crucial role VI professionals can play in collaborating with Indigenous communities to develop braille codes for their heritage languages. Participants will explore why this work matters, learn from existing Indigenous braille systems, and discover actionable steps for culturally responsive partnership.

Teaching in the Age of AI: Evidence-Based Guidance from AFB Research

Presented by Sarahelizabeth Baguhn, William Hanuschock

Artificial intelligence (AI) integration is transforming the globe, with schools being no exception. This presentation explores feedback from adults, both with and without visual impairments, on AI's role in their professional and personal lives. It highlights essential skills transition-aged students need to prepare for an advanced, technology-integrated future.

Exploring the Internship Experiences of O&M Students Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired

Presented by Dr. Laura Bozeman, Brad Blair, Nora Griffin-Shirley

The internship is one of the most valuable experiences that shapes an O&M instructor, and for those who are blind or visually impaired, the internship has yet to be talked about. In this session, researchers explore what people who are blind and visually impaired had to say about their internship experiences. The team also invited internship supervisors to discuss their own experiences mentoring mobility instructors who could not see towards certification in the field.

Empowering Digital Math Learning: Digital Math Resources for Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments from the T.E.A.M. Initiative (Tech Access and Equity in Math)

Presented by Michael Tuttle

Explore a collection of digital math tools cultivated to promote successful digital math learning experiences for students with visual impairments. These tools include skill-level checklists, accessible workflow supports for math learning, previews of digital apps and curricula, and professional development resources for digital math (e.g., communities of practice, webinars, and the T.E.A.M. digital math page). Get practical strategies you can use immediately.

How does Cerebral Visual Impairment Impact Instruction in Orientation and Mobility?

Presented by Dawn Anderson,Valery Kircher

Instructing Orientation and Mobility (O&M) skills to children with Cerebral Visual Impairment (CVI) presents distinct challenges. It is essential that O&M specialists are knowledgeable and fluent in CVI language to assess and then instruct children in O&M skills and concepts at all age levels. O&M specialists must understand how Higher Visual Functions impact children with CVI and ultimately how this impacts assessment, program planning and instruction.

EMPOWER VI: Data-Driven Lessons from a Virtual Mentorship Program for Blind/Low Vision Youth

Presented by Hilary Travers, Emily Lanchak

EMPOWER VI, an OSEP-funded virtual mentorship program, pairs blind/low vision youth with adult mentors who share lived experience. Two years of data show impacts on self-determination, self-image, and social connectedness, plus key design features and lessons learned. Educators will learn how mentorship benefits rural and underserved youth and how, through EMPOWER VI, they can connect students and families to a proven mentorship opportunity.

Emergent Literacy and Language Development for Non-Verbal, Tactile Learners

Presented by Shanna Hamilton

Take an in-depth look at emergent literacy and language development for non-verbal, tactile learners. Learn the Circle Model of Tactile Language through clear, accessible definitions and practical, real-world examples that you can

begin using with your students right away.

Empowering Excellence: Elevating Evaluation in Education for Students with Visual Impairments: A Focus on Annual TSVI and COMS Performance Reviews

Presented by Jessica Smith

Elevating evaluation of TSVIs & COMS is critical for excellence in visual impairment education. This interactive community conversation is designed to collaboratively begin to develop training modules for school administrators. Participants will analyze current performance review challenges, pinpoint specialty-specific competencies unique to TSVI/COMS roles, and generate consensus on best practices to ensure annual evaluations drive meaningful professional growth & improve outcomes for students.

From Silos to Systems: Sharing O&M Program Practices to Strengthen Our Field

Presented by Danene Fast

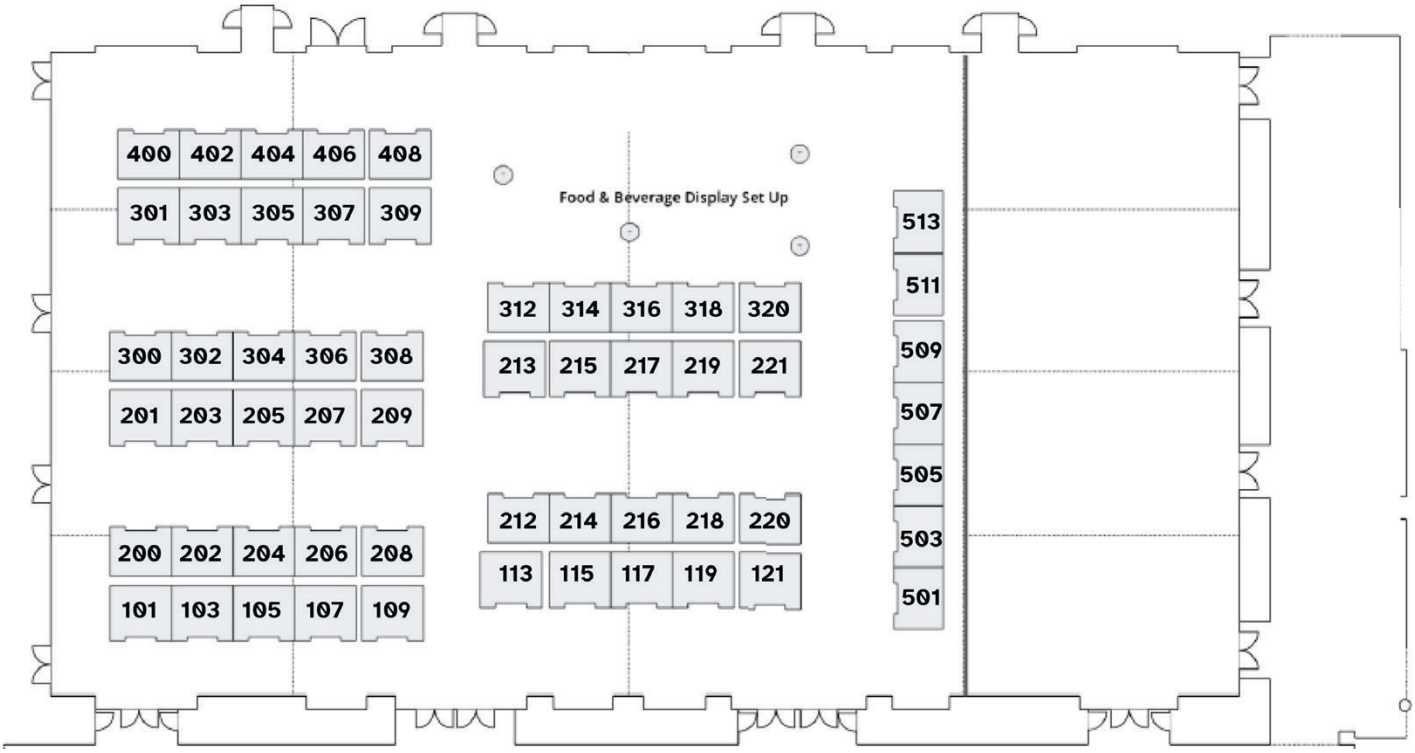
University O&M preparation programs often face challenges in sustainability, accreditation, and workforce shortages. This session shares how design, transparency, and collaboration can strengthen programs and support successful accreditation. Participants will explore ways to share resources, reduce division, and improve outcomes and advocacy by shifting from competition to collaboration.

What Makes PD Transformative for Vision Professionals? Insights From Research and Practice

Presented by Stephanie Walker

Effective PD can transform practice, yet its impact often varies. This session shares findings from a mixed-methods study examining how synchronous PD influences instructional skills, confidence, and the adaptability of participants. The study resulted in a 3-tier framework that reflects progressive learning outcomes across awareness, application, and implementation. Field-based examples highlight components that deepen adult learning and support individuals who design or select PD.

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BrailleDoodle! from the Touch Pad Pro Foundation
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irie-at.com

Leader Dogs for the Blind
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www.leaderdog.org

Lighthouse Central Florida
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Lighthouse Louisiana
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www.mirausa.org

National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled, Library of Congress
Booth No. 214
www.loc.gov/nls/

Northwest Association for Blind Athletes
Booth No. 309
NWABA.org

NRTC on Blindness and Low Vision
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205 Morgan Avenue
Mississippi State University
Mississippi State, MS 39762
www.ntac.blind.msstate.edu/

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Pediatric Cortical Visual Impairment Society
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pcvis.vision

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Austin, TX 78756
www.tsbvi.edu

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Lubbock, TX, US, 79409
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Brentwood, TN, US, 37027
visionthroughmusic.org

VisionServe Alliance
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St. Louis, MO 63144
visionservealliance.org

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www.ability2access.com

World Services for the Blind
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www.wsblind.org

Zimmerman Low Vision Simulation Kit
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ACVREP
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Address Website

COSB
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cosbvi.org

Foreseeable Future Foundation
Table No. 607
Address Website

Kentucky AER Chapter
Booth No. 601
Address Website

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE 2026 AER AWARDS RECIPIENTS

The 2026 AER International Awards Committee is pleased to announce the 2026 AERBVI Award Recipients. Join us in celebrating the remarkable accomplishments, dedication, and lasting impact of the following honorees, whose work continues to strengthen and inspire the field.



ALFRED ALLEN AWARD

Keith Tackett



C. WARREN BLEDSOE AWARD

Mary Nelle McLennan



AMBROSE SHOTWELL MEMORIAL AWARD

Paul Smith



MARY K. BAUMAN AWARD

Dr. L. Penny Rosenblum



DOUGLAS MCFARLAND AWARD

Dr. Michael Munro



RICHARD L. WELSH CHAPTER LEADERSHIP AWARD

Maria Lepore-Stevens

OUTSTANDING CHAPTER AWARD

Pennsylvania-Delaware Chapter

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE 2026 AER AWARDS RECIPIENTS

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Janet Barlow Environmental Access Service Award
Lukas Franck

Sandy Kronick Distinguished Service Award
Jamie Maffit

Lawrence E. Blaha Memorial Award
Dr. Eugene Bourquin

Award of Recognition
Margaret Winn

Newcomer-Hill Award
Autumn Booths-Speer

PERSONNEL PREP DIVISION

Josephine L. Taylor Awards
Dr. Sandra Rosen

VISION REHABILITATION THERAPY DIVISION

The Bruce McKenzie Award for Lifetime Achievement
Cathleen McGuire

The Elizabeth Lennon Award for Meritorious Achievement
Nancy Parkin-Bashizi

The Alice Raftary Rising Star Award
Razan Eltayeb

The Susan and Paul Ponchillia VRT Publication Award
Kendra Farrow
Jennifer Ottowitz

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Dr. Pamela Beach
Dr. Charles E. Buell, Posthumosly

Dedicated Service Award
Erin Weaver

Leadership Award
Billy Henry

Future Professional Award
Kasey Zamberlin-Ogletree

MULTIPLE DISABILITIES & DEAFBLINDNESS DIVISION

The Virginia M. Sowell Award
Kristi Probst

The Samuel Gridley Howe Award
Anne Olson-Murphy

ACCESS AND TECHNOLOGY DIVISION

Impactful Research Award
Saraelizabeth Baguhn, PhD

Innovation Award
Caroline Karbowski

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OF ATTENDANCE

The Association for Education & Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired presents this certificate to

For the participation in the
AER International Conference 2026
Louisville Marriott Downtown
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July 29 - August 2, 2026

Lee Sonnenberg
Lee Sonnenberg, AER Executive Director

August 2, 2026



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AER 2026 INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

CONTACT

Join a community of professionals dedicated to *Sharing Our Stories – Impacting The Future* at the AER International Conference 2026 in Louisville, Kentucky.

For questions, please contact conference@aerbvi.org, we are here to help.

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