

The 2027 Event Professional: Designing the Skills, Mindset, and Experiences the Industry Needs

Session Description

The business events industry is evolving faster than ever, driven by artificial intelligence, rising expectations for sustainability, increasing strategic responsibilities, and more complex stakeholder environments. Yet many organizations continue to struggle with a fundamental question:

Are graduates entering the workforce truly prepared for the realities of today's events industry?

This highly interactive session brings together industry professionals and event educators from multiple universities for a collaborative design lab focused on defining and strengthening the future talent pipeline.

Rather than a traditional panel discussion, this session flips the format into an interactive reverse panel and problem-solving workshop where participants actively shape the conversation. Faculty leaders briefly share insights from experiential learning models and workforce research, then participants work together to identify the most critical competency gaps and design practical strategies to close them.

Through guided discussion, collaborative exercises, and real-world scenario exploration, participants will help define what the 2027 event professional should know, practice, and experience before entering the industry.

Participants will leave with actionable strategies they can implement immediately—whether mentoring emerging professionals, shaping internship experiences, strengthening partnerships with universities, or influencing the development of future talent pipelines.

This session directly supports the Summit's focus on aligning strategy with impact by addressing one of the industry's most pressing long-term challenges: preparing the next generation of leaders capable of navigating the complexity of modern business events.

Faculty Panelists

- Christine Cleaver – NYU
- Brianna Clark – High Point University
- Tom Padron – California State University, East Bay

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the session, participants will be able to:

- Identify the most critical competency gaps between emerging professionals and industry expectations
- Evaluate experiential learning approaches that most effectively prepare students for real-world event leadership
- Define the essential technical skills, human competencies, and experiential exposures needed for future event professionals
- Develop one actionable strategy to strengthen collaboration between industry and education
- Apply practical approaches to mentoring and developing emerging professionals within their organizations

Why This Session Matters to the Industry

The events industry depends on a strong pipeline of talent prepared for increasingly complex roles. By bringing together industry professionals and educators in a collaborative design session, this workshop creates a rare opportunity for participants to influence how the next generation of event leaders is developed.

Participants will not only discuss workforce readiness—they will actively shape it.

Session Format

Learning Laboratory / Interactive Industry Design Lab

This session is structured as an interactive working session where participants collaborate to define workforce needs and develop actionable solutions. Activities include:

- Live audience polling to identify workforce readiness gaps
- Rapid faculty insight round to frame current education and industry challenges
- Reverse panel discussion driven by participant questions
- Small-group design exercise: Build the Ideal 2027 Event Professional
- Collaborative problem-solving focused on closing the readiness gap

Participants will leave with both peer insights and practical strategies they can apply within their organizations and partnerships with academic programs.

Welcome + Industry Reality Check

Live polling and discussion exploring how prepared emerging professionals are for today's business events environment.

Faculty Lightning Insights

Short perspectives from educators highlighting the biggest challenges in preparing students for the realities of event leadership.

Cleaver

One of the biggest misconceptions about preparing future event professionals is that students simply need more experience. While experiential learning remains essential, experience alone is no longer enough. Today's students often graduate having completed internships, volunteered at events, participated in campus organizations, and worked on real-world projects, yet employers continue to identify readiness gaps. The challenge is not whether students are gaining experience—it is whether those experiences are intentionally developing the competencies the industry needs most. Technical skills such as event technology, budgeting, registration systems, and AI tools can be taught relatively quickly. What is far more difficult to develop are the human and leadership skills that enable professionals to thrive in an increasingly complex environment.

As we look toward 2027, successful event professionals will need to navigate ambiguity, communicate effectively with diverse stakeholders, make decisions with incomplete information, adapt to constant change, and lead with confidence in high-pressure situations. These are the skills that emerge through meaningful experiential learning, reflection, mentorship, and industry engagement. The opportunity for both educators and industry leaders is to work together to intentionally create experiences that move beyond teaching event execution and instead develop adaptable, resilient professionals who are prepared to lead the future of the business events industry.

Clark

One of the greatest challenges facing event management educators today is preparing students for a professional environment that often operates differently from the educational environment in which they are being trained. Higher education has appropriately evolved to become more supportive, accessible, and student-centered. Faculty are expected to provide detailed instructions, frequent reminders, structured feedback, and individualized support to help students succeed. These practices create valuable opportunities for learning and growth.

However, the event industry is often characterized by ambiguity, urgency, and limited opportunities for second chances. Clients do not always provide reminders. Vendors do not wait for assignments to be submitted late. Event attendees do not adjust their expectations because a team member misunderstood a deadline. Success in the profession frequently depends on an individual's ability to manage competing priorities, seek information independently, communicate proactively, and adapt quickly when circumstances change.

As educators, we are increasingly challenged to balance supporting students while simultaneously preparing them for these professional realities. The goal is not to reduce

support, but rather to help students gradually develop the self-management, accountability, and self-advocacy skills necessary for long-term success. Future event professionals must learn not only how to complete tasks, but also how to navigate environments where expectations may be less explicit and where personal responsibility plays a significant role in professional effectiveness.

As we look toward 2027, one of the most important questions facing both educators and industry leaders is how we can create learning experiences that remain inclusive and supportive while also helping students develop the independence, resilience, and professional judgment that the events industry demands.

Padron

Most students major/minor/concentrate in meeting and event planning and management because they had an experience early in their life that sparked an interest. They begin searching for inspiration particularly on social media where they are exposed to endless glamour shots of a variety of events. These photos are moments captured to show different details of the particular event. Swipe to the next one. Like. Save. Share. Comment. They begin to search further for videos and along the way may experience an influencer and develop a cache of images and videos that they might like to recreate one day. Many of these events are mega events (Super Bowl, Coachella, Olympics). The students are exposed to the “walking into the event” moments. The sensationalization that is the part of each of these respective events and mini events. They fail to realize the months and years, time, effort, and thousands of people that it took to make it happen. Upon graduation, they expect to jump right into being a meeting/event planner and producing events of this caliber, noting that formal education provides 10% of the knowledge; the other 90% is gained in working in the industry.

Unrealistic expectations are one aspect that needs to be carefully monitored for the 2027 professionals. As social media continues to have an immense impact on all generations, mainly the younger generations, reality checks are necessary at regular intervals. Emerging professionals enter the industry with eyes wide open and are eager to be involved and make their mark, and at the same time may come with preconceived notions as to what they will actually be doing for their first 3-5 years. This is a critical time as some may leave the industry due to their expectations not being met. Educators and industry professionals sharing their stories and realities is integral in the students having a full and transparent understanding of the industry and positions.

Reverse Panel: Industry Questions - Ask Us Anything

Participants drive the discussion through live questions and shared industry experiences.

Interactive Design Exercise: The Ideal 2027 Event Professional (20 minutes)

Participants work in small groups to define: Competencies, Experience, and Skills

Areas for discussion:

- Top Technical Competencies
- Essential Leadership and Human Skills
- Required Experiential Learning
- AI and technology fluency
- Industry Engagement Expectations

Problem Lab: Closing the Readiness

Closing

The 2027 Event Professional

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Faculty Panelists

Dr. Christine Cleaver

Clinical Assistant Professor of Events
Management

Jonathan M. Tisch Center of Hospitality

New York University

Dr. Brianna Clark, CFEE

Associate Professor of Event Management

Chair, Department of Event and Hospitality
Management

High Point University

Dr. Thomas C. Padron, CMP, CHE, CWP

Professor and Program Coordinator Hospitality
and Tourism

Department of Hospitality, Recreation and
Tourism

California State University, East Bay



**HIGH POINT
UNIVERSITY**

THE PREMIER LIFE SKILLS UNIVERSITY

David S. Congdon School of Entrepreneurship

Event Management



**CAL STATE EAST
BAY**

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

01

Identify Competency Gaps

Recognize the most critical gaps between emerging professionals and industry expectations.

02

Evaluate Experiential Learning

Assess approaches that most effectively prepare students for real-world event leadership.

03

Define Essential Skills

Articulate the technical skills, human competencies, and experiential exposures needed.

04

Strengthen Collaboration

Develop one actionable strategy to bridge industry and education partnerships.

05

Mentor Emerging Talent

Apply practical approaches to developing emerging professionals within your organization.



SESSION FORMAT

Learning Laboratory

Interactive Industry Design Lab — This session is built for active participation. Expect hands-on exercises, collaborative problem-solving, and real-time idea generation designed to mirror the dynamic environments event professionals navigate every day.



INDUSTRY REALITY CHECK

How Prepared Are Emerging Professionals?

Today's business events environment demands more than ever before — yet a persistent readiness gap exists between what academic programs deliver and what the industry requires on day one.

When poll is active respond
at

PollEv.com
/christinecleaver507





Faculty Lightning Insights

Our three faculty panelists share rapid-fire perspectives drawn from the classroom, industry partnerships, and their own research — offering a front-row view of how higher education is responding to the evolving demands of the event profession.



**Ask Us
Anything**

INTERACTIVE EXERCISE

Design Lab: The Ideal 2027 Event Professional

Work in small groups to define what excellence looks like. Add your answers to the Word Cloud.



Top Technical Competencies



Essential Leadership & Human Skills



Required Experiential Learning



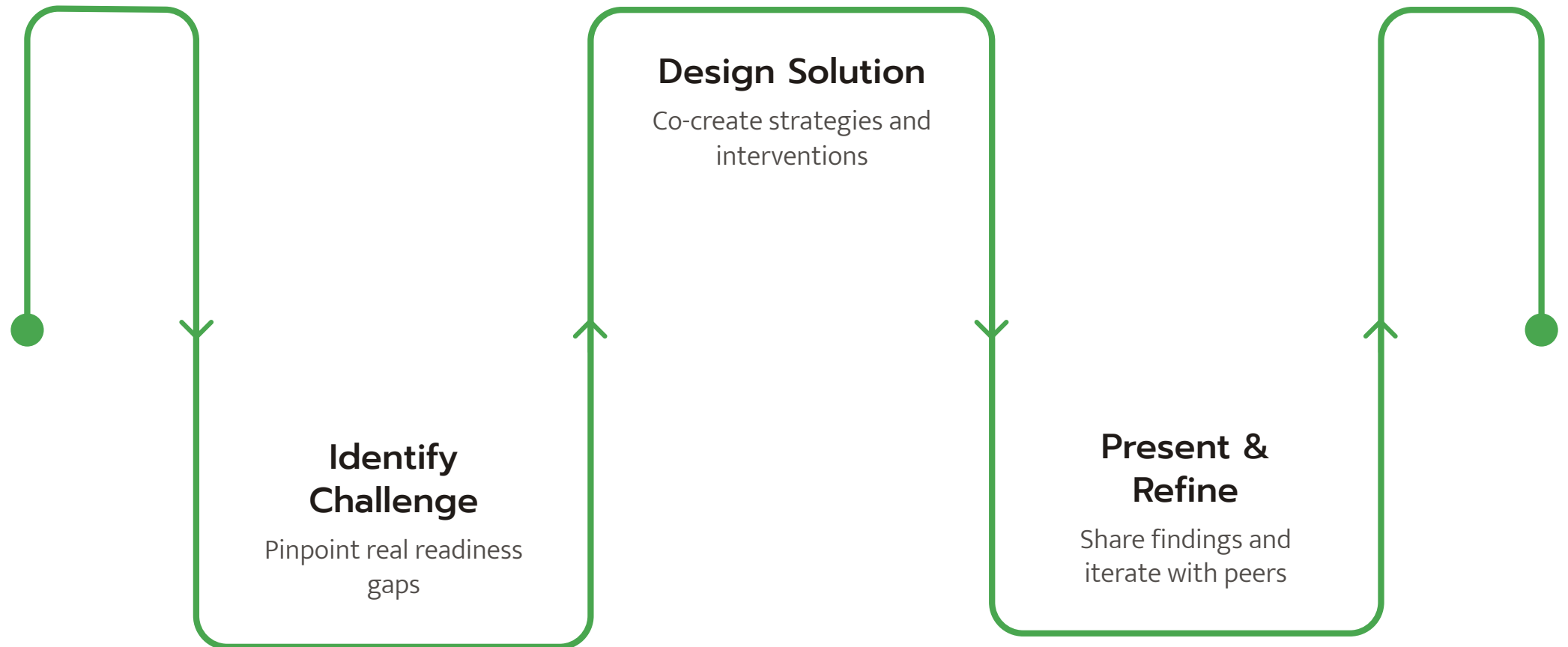
AI & Technology Fluency



Industry Engagement Expectations

Closing the Readiness Gap

Groups tackle real classroom-to-industry-ready challenges — identifying friction points and designing practical solutions.



Let's Continue the Conversation

Connect with our faculty panelists on LinkedIn to keep the dialogue going beyond today's session.

Dr. Christine Cleaver

New York University

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Dr. Brianna Clark

High Point University

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