

A U S T R A L I A N E V E N T S Y M P O S I U M

20 - 21 October 2026

Aanuka Beach House
Coffs Harbour NSW



www.eventawards.com.au

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

TUESDAY 20 OCTOBER 2026

TIME	SESSION	ROOM
8:30 - 9:00am	<i>Arrival Tea and Coffee</i>	Outrigger
9:00 - 9:15am	WELCOME TO THE 2026 EVENT SYMPOSIUM <i>Ian Steigrad, Managing Director, Australian Event Awards and Symposium</i>	Saltwater
9:15 - 10:20am	PLENARY: SESSIONS INTRODUCTION <i>Zach King, Cindy Evelyn Elkhouri, Anne-Marie Byrne, Andy Lopez, Ben Schubert, Carol McCracken, Wendy Lacey, Geoff Baker, David George</i>	Saltwater
10:30 - 11:00am	<i>Morning Tea and Coffee Break</i>	Outrigger
11:00 - 12:00pm	CONCURRENT SESSIONS	
	Make AI Useful in Your Company <i>Zach King</i>	Saltwater
	Community Event Science: Understanding the DNA Behind Successful Community Events <i>Cindy Evelyn Elkhouri, Anne-Marie Byrne</i>	Pacific Lounge
12:00 - 1:00pm	<i>Lunch Break</i>	Outrigger
1:00 - 2:00pm	CONCURRENT SESSIONS	
	Community and Connection: The Secret Sauce to Making Festivals Stick <i>Andy Lopez, Ben Schubert</i>	Pacific Lounge
	Revenue by Design: Engineering Ticket Demand <i>Carol McCracken, Wendy Lacey, Geoff Baker, David George</i>	Saltwater
2:10 - 2:45pm	PLENARY: SESSIONS INTRODUCTION <i>Stephanie Cassimatis, Nicole Walker</i>	Saltwater
2:45 - 3:15pm	<i>Afternoon Tea and Coffee Break</i>	Outrigger
3:15 - 4:15pm	CONCURRENT SESSIONS	
	From Event Delivery to Event Leadership <i>Stephanie Cassimatis</i>	Pacific Lounge
	Operational Decision or Client Authority? Managing Competing Priorities When Clients Make Uninformed Event Decisions <i>Nicole Walker</i>	Saltwater
4:20 - 5:30pm	PLENARY: Designing Events That Matter – From Bold Ideas to Lasting Impact <i>David Yakas</i>	Saltwater
6:00 - 9:00pm	BEACH HOUSE BBQ AT AANUKA	

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

WEDNESDAY 21 OCTOBER 2026

TIME	SESSION	ROOM
8:30 - 9:00am	<i>Arrival Tea and Coffee</i>	Outrigger
9:0 - 10:30am	PLENARY: SESSIONS INTRODUCTION <i>Hannah Pike, Simon Irwin, Prue Simson, Amy Byars, Alexandra Buzila, Linda Tillman, Cathy Treasure</i>	Saltwater
10:30 - 11:00am	<i>Morning Tea and Coffee Break</i>	Outrigger
11:00 - 12:00pm	CONCURRENT SESSIONS AND WORKSHOP	
	Small but Mighty: How a Boutique Agency can Deliver Australia's Biggest Events <i>Hannah Pike</i>	Pacific Lounge
	WORKSHOP Partnerships that Perform – How to attract Sponsors and build Smarter Event Collaborations <i>Linda Tillman, Cathy Treasure</i>	Saltwater
12:00 - 1:00pm	<i>Lunch Break</i>	Outrigger
1:00 - 2:00pm	CONCURRENT SESSIONS	
	The Rise of Agri-Tourism: Beef Australia's \$100M Success Story <i>Simon Irwin</i>	Pacific Lounge
	WORKSHOP Continued	Saltwater
2:10 - 3:10pm	CONCURRENT SESSIONS	
	Leading Through Chaos <i>Prue Simson</i>	Pacific Lounge
	Delivering Accessible Event Experiences: An Illuminate Adelaide Case Study <i>Amy Byars, Alexandra Buzila</i>	Saltwater
3:10 - 3:45pm	<i>Afternoon Tea and Coffee Break</i>	Outrigger
3:45 - 5:00pm	CLOSING PLENARY: Social Media for Events: Before, During & After <i>Alicia Smith</i> Closing Remarks	Saltwater
5:00 - 5:45pm	<i>Delegate time to change for Event Awards Ceremony</i>	
6:00 - 11:00pm	2026 AUSTRALIAN EVENT AWARDS CEREMONY	Pacific Bay Resort

TUESDAY 20 OCTOBER 2026

WELCOME TO THE 2026 AUSTRALIAN EVENT SYMPOSIUM

Welcome to the 2026 Australian Event Symposium!

There's something special about a room full of event professionals who aren't working the event. For once, nobody needs to check the run sheet, chase a supplier or find the missing lanyards. These two days are yours: a chance to listen, learn, compare notes and borrow the best ideas from the people who understand your job better than anyone.

Our speakers have generously agreed to open their playbooks, sharing not just the polished results but the near-misses, workarounds and hard-won lessons behind them. The honesty is what makes the Symposium valuable, and we thank every presenter and facilitator for bringing it.

Some of the most useful conversations won't happen on stage. They'll happen over coffee, at the networking functions and in the corridors between sessions, so please introduce yourself to someone new and ask the questions you'd usually save for later.

Thank you to our partners and to the City of Coffs Harbour for helping make this program possible, and to each of you for investing your time. We hope you leave inspired, better connected and with a head full of ideas.

Ian Steigrad, Managing Director, Australian Event Awards

OPENING PLENARY

SESSIONS INTRODUCTION - MORNING

This Introduction Session will give delegates insight into the upcoming sessions of the morning. Hear from the speakers about what their session will be addressing, what you'll gain and be introduced to the speakers delivering the session.

Each speaker will have 15 minutes to give delegates an introduction to their topic and from there, delegates can pick which session they wish to attend. Q&A will be available after all presentations.

Speakers:

- **Zach King**, Works HQ
- **Cindy Evelyn Elkhouri & Anne-Marie Byrne**, Canterbury Bankstown Council
- **Andy Lopez & Ben Schubert**, Out There Productions
- **Carol McCracken**, Caravan and Camping WA, **Wendy Lacey**, TLC Events, **Geoff Baker & David George**, Oztix

TUESDAY 20 OCTOBER 2026

CONCURRENT SESSIONS

Make AI Useful in Your Company

How to build a company brain that gives AI the context of your team, clients and operations. Most companies have tried ChatGPT, Gemini or Copilot. The first results often look impressive, but the work is generic because the AI knows nothing about the business using it. This session will delve into how to create a simple company brain around the knowledge they already have, then make it concrete – watch this in action in an event-relevant demonstration. The demonstration will explore the comparison between the output from a straightforward event-planning prompt, with the output from the same prompt loaded with two layers of context:

- The company's permanent brain: its standards, templates, preferred ways of working, supplier knowledge and lessons from previous projects
- An event brain: the brief, audience, venue, budget, schedule, suppliers, risks and decisions for that specific project

The difference in the output will make the value of context immediately clear.



Zach King

Works HQ

Community Event Science: Understanding the DNA Behind Successful Community Events

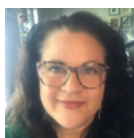
From small local activations to major signature festivals, successful community events are built on the same underlying principles of human behaviour, movement, identity, connection and place. This presentation introduces the concept of “Community Event Science” — a practical framework exploring how understanding community identity and event ecosystems can transform the way events are planned, delivered and experienced.

Using Canterbury-Bankstown Council's award-winning signature event Lakemba Nights During Ramadan as a real-world case study, this session will explore how culturally significant community events operate as complex social systems that require more than logistics and programming alone. Through operational insights, behavioural observations and community-centred design principles, attendees will gain a deeper understanding of how events can strengthen belonging, social cohesion and place identity while successfully managing large-scale operational complexity.



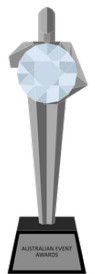
**Cindy Evelyn
Elkhouri**

Canterbury
Bankstown Council



**Anne-Marie
Byrne**

Canterbury
Bankstown Council



TUESDAY 20 OCTOBER 2026

CONCURRENT SESSIONS

Community and Connection: The Secret Sauce to Making Festivals Stick

The Summernats Car Festival has been an Australian institution for nearly 40 years. It is now the flagship event of a series of linked festivals around Australia and has recently expanded to the USA and New Zealand. Attendance continues to grow year on year, bucking a trend that has seen other massed attendance events struggle and fail in recent years. The enduring and continued growth is a result of its real and genuine connection to the community it serves.



Andy Lopez

Out There
Productions



Ben Schubert

Out There
Productions

Revenue by Design: Engineering Ticket Demand

A practical session led by Oztix, Australia's largest independent ticketing company, alongside Australia's most experienced and respected event producers, exploring how to engineer ticket demand through consumer behaviour, data, audience growth and benchmarking for success.



Carol McCracken

Caravan and
Camping WA



Wendy Lacey

TLC Events



Geoff Baker

Oztix



David George

Oztix

PLENARY

SESSIONS INTRODUCTION - AFTERNOON

This Introduction Session will give delegates insight into the upcoming sessions of the afternoon. Hear from the speakers about what their session will be addressing, what you'll gain and be introduced to the speakers delivering the session.

Each speaker will have 15 minutes to give delegates an introduction to their topic and from there, delegates can pick which session they wish to attend. Q&A will be available after all presentations.

Speakers:

- **Stephanie Cassimatis**, Pink Caviar Events
- **Nicole Walker**, Lightning Bolt Consulting

TUESDAY 20 OCTOBER 2026

CONCURRENT SESSIONS

From Event Delivery to Event Leadership

Great events do not rely on logistics alone. As the industry grows more complex, the most valuable event professionals are those who can move beyond task management and into confident leadership. In this session, Stephanie Cassimatis explores the shift from delivering event components to leading outcomes – through stronger decision making, stakeholder confidence, team direction and strategic thinking.

Designed for professionals working in high-pressure environments, this presentation unpacks what is really takes to lead events and expectations with greater authority, clarity and commercial awareness.



Stephanie Cassimatis

Pink Caviar Events

Operational Decision or Client Authority? Managing Competing Priorities When Clients Make Uninformed Event Decisions

“The most successful event professionals don’t win every argument. They build enough trust that clients make better decisions.”

Every event professional has experienced it: a client making a decision that conflicts with operational realities, budget constraints, attendee experience, risk management or best practice advice. While clients ultimately own the event, event professionals are often left navigating the consequences of decisions made without a full understanding of the operational implications.

This session explores the delicate balance between respecting client authority and exercising professional responsibility. Drawing on real-world examples from the business events industry, we will examine how event professionals can influence outcomes, communicate risk effectively, build trust-based partnerships and maintain professional integrity when faced with difficult client decisions.

Attendees will gain practical strategies for managing competing priorities, handling challenging conversations and positioning themselves as trusted advisors rather than order-takers. The session will challenge participants to consider where the line sits between client choice and professional duty, and how to create stronger decision-making frameworks that ultimately lead to more successful events.



Nicole Walker

Lightning Bolt Consulting

TUESDAY 20 OCTOBER 2026

PLENARY

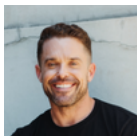
Designing Events That Matter – From bold Ideas to Lasting Impact

In an industry known for flawless execution, this powerful session challenges a critical question: what do our events actually change? Moving beyond logistics, aesthetics, and “running a great show,” this presentation reframes events as strategic tools for influence, alignment, and lasting impact.

Through real-world examples and honest reflections, the session explores how to shift from simply delivering events to intentionally designing outcomes. Attendees will be guided through a practical framework centred on clarity, connection, creativity, and conversion. David carefully ensures every event has purpose, resonates emotionally, and drives meaningful results, and wants to share this with you.

The presentation also highlights the importance of cultural context, human experience, and energy design, demonstrating how inclusive, thoughtful approaches deepen engagement and extend impact beyond the room. It challenges common industry habits, like prioritising theme over purpose, and replaces them with sharper, more strategic thinking.

Delegates will leave with a renewed perspective on their role as event designers, not just organisers, along with actionable questions and tools to elevate their next project. More than inspiration, David's session equips attendees to create events that influence decisions, shift behaviour, and leave a lasting legacy.



David Yakas

Wrapped Creations

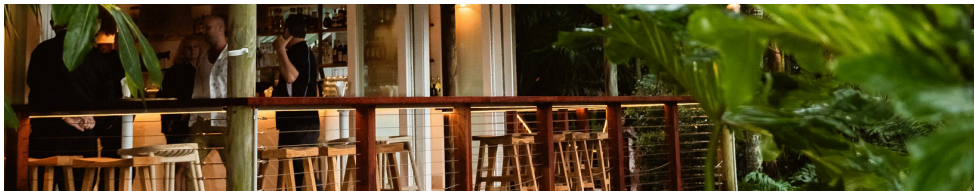
BEACH HOUSE BBQ AT AANUKA

After a day of boosting your skills, join us for a relaxed Beach House BBQ Dinner on the deck overlooking beautiful Diggers Beach.

Dress code: Think tropical - florals, bright colours and feel-good vibes encouraged.

Includes:

- BBQ buffet dinner
- Complimentary house drinks from 6:00pm – 7:00pm
- Bar available for additional purchases at delegates' expense
- Entertainment



WEDNESDAY 21 OCTOBER 2026

OPENING PLENARY

SESSIONS INTRODUCTION

This Introduction Session will give delegates insight into the upcoming sessions of the morning. Hear from the speakers about what their session will be addressing, what you'll gain and be introduced to the speakers delivering the session.

Each speaker will have 15 minutes to give delegates an introduction to their topic and from there, delegates can pick which session they wish to attend. Q&A will be available after all presentations.

Speakers:

- **Hannah Pike**, We Are Gather
- **Simon Irwin**, Beef Australia Limited
- **Prue Simson**, Australian Equine and Livestock Events Centre
- **Amy Byars & Alexandra Buzila**, Illuminate Adelaide
- **Cathy Treasure & Linda Tillman**, Australian Centre for Regional Events

WORKSHOP

Partnerships that Perform – How to attract Sponsors and build Smarter Event Collaborations

This practical two-hour workshops will show event professionals how to secure right-fit sponsors who genuinely align with your event and keep them coming back year after year. Delegates will explore how to move beyond traditional sponsorship models to build aligned, long-term partnerships that expand reach, enhance the attendee experience, and generate measurable return on investment – creating partnerships that deliver genuine, lasting value for both the event and the sponsor.



Cathy Treasure & Linda Tillman

Australian Centre for
Regional Events

CONCURRENT SESSION

Small but Mighty: How a Boutique Agency can Deliver Australia's Biggest Events

In an industry often dominated by large agencies with big teams and bigger budgets, We Are Gather has carved out a remarkable niche, delivering some of Australia's most celebrated food, wine and tourism events with a lean, passionate team.

This session pulls back the curtain on what it really takes to compete at the highest level as a small agency, from landing government partnerships and major brand sponsors to building events that win national awards and keep coming back year after year.



Hannah Pike
We Are Gather

WEDNESDAY 21 OCTOBER 2026

CONCURRENT SESSION

The Rise of Agri-Tourism: Beef Australia's \$100M Success Story

Beef Australia's story began as a one-off event for Australia's Bicentennial celebrations in 1988. Nearly four decades later, it has evolved into the premier beef industry event in the Southern Hemisphere — attracting more than 120,000 attendees, generating over \$110 million in direct economic impact for Central Queensland, and placing Rockhampton firmly on the global stage every three years.

From producers and international trade delegations to industry leaders, innovators and consumers, Beef Australia has become far more than an agricultural event. It is a case study in regional ambition, destination impact and the power of building a global event outside a capital city.

This session explores how a regional Queensland city became home to one of the world's most significant agricultural events, the strategic decisions behind its long-term growth, and why staying deeply connected to industry — without being constrained by it — has been critical to its success.



Simon Irwin

Beef Australia Limited

CONCURRENT SESSIONS

Leading Through Chaos

In Leading Through Chaos, Prue Simson shares practical lessons from a career spent leading large-scale events and venues where no two days are ever the same. Drawing on her experience across major sporting, equestrian, and multi-stakeholder environments, she explores what it really takes to stay steady when pressure is high, priorities shift quickly, and the unexpected becomes the norm.

This session is grounded in real-world leadership, not theory. Prue talks about how to make clear decisions under pressure, keep teams aligned in fast-moving situations, and maintain momentum when plans change. She also reflects on the importance of preparation, trust, communication, and adaptability when leading people through uncertainty.

Rather than treating chaos as something to avoid, Prue reframes it as something leaders can learn to navigate with confidence. Delegates will come away with practical ideas they can apply immediately in their own roles, whether they are managing teams, projects, events, or broader organisational change.



Prue Simson

Australian Equine and
Livestock Events Centre

WEDNESDAY 21 OCTOBER 2026

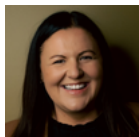
Delivering Accessible Event Experiences: An Illuminate Adelaide Case Study

What makes an event accessible?

Awareness of accessibility and inclusivity within the event industry continues to evolve and grow, challenging outdated perspectives and reshaping how events are designed and delivered.

This session explores the evolving and broad nature of accessibility through the lens of one of Australia's fastest-growing major events. Although only in its sixth year, Illuminate Adelaide has expanded its accessibility program exponentially since launching in 2021. By identifying barriers, targeting opportunities for improvement, and collaborating with disability-led organisations, Illuminate has prioritised more inclusive ways for mass audiences to participate in and engage with its program.

Delegates will leave this session with insight into making meaningful progress toward more inclusive events, whether you are just starting out or building on existing accessibility initiatives.



Amy Byars

Illuminate Adelaide



Alexandra Buzila

Illuminate Adelaide

CLOSING PLENARY

Social Media for Events: Before, During & After

How do you use social media to get people excited about an event, show what's happening while it's on and make the most of it once it's over?

In this practical workshop, Alicia will walk through Instagram features that can help promote events and support your business goals. You'll learn what to post before, during and after an event, how to capture useful content on the day, and how to give that content a longer life. Alicia will also share real examples and case studies to show these ideas in action.

Whether you're hosting an event or taking part in one, you'll leave with a clearer plan for using social media at every stage.



Alicia Smith

The Social Flip

2026 AUSTRALIAN EVENT AWARDS CEREMONY

SPEAKERS



Andy Lopez started Out There Productions in 1996. In 2009, Andy acquired the iconic Summernats car festival. In 2022, Out There moved into mainstream motorsport, establishing the National Drag Racing Championship. Andy and Out There took their uniquely Australian product internationally, staging two successful Summernats festivals in the USA. 2027 will see the first Summernats NZ join the international expansion.



Carol McCracken is CEO of Caravan & Camping Western Australia and a tourism leader with 40 years' experience across travel, aviation, hotels, events, incentives and conferences. Carol has led the transformation of WA's peak caravan industry body, growing membership, strengthening industry advocacy and repositioning the organisation for greater impact.



Hannah Pike is the Co-founder of We Are Gather, a boutique events agency. With a track record that includes multiple Australian Event Awards wins, including Small Agency of the Year at last year's Australian Event Awards, and long-standing partnerships with government tourism bodies and major brands, Hannah has built a reputation for delivering world-class events with a small but highly capable team.



Ben Schubert is the Chief Operating Officer for the Out There Group. An experienced project director with specific experience in safety and risk management, Ben's experience in the delivery major events includes the Vancouver and London Olympics to the Gold Coast Commonwealth Games. He was the project director for the Formula 1 Grand Prix in Melbourne prior to joining the Out There Group.



Prue Simson is the Manager of the Australian Equine and Livestock Events Centre in Tamworth, leading one of regional Australia's busiest agricultural event venues. With her experience delivering large-scale, multi-sport and equestrian events in Australia and internationally, she brings deep expertise in venue leadership, event operations, stakeholder engagement, and managing complex environments under pressure.



Alicia Smith is a social media coach, marketing consultant and content creator with experience in marketing and digital production. She works with businesses to help them understand social media and how it can build awareness, connect with customers and support business growth. Her approach is simple and hands-on, helping business owners feel more confident using social media with purpose.



Co-founders of The Australian Centre for Regional Events, **Linda Tillman & Cathy Treasure** bring over 50 combined years of experience in events. Cathy is a highly experienced events strategist with experience working across global, national, and regional events. **Cathy** brings a rare depth and breadth of insight to event strategy, delivery, and legacy. **Linda** is a regional tourism and events strategist and practitioner boasting expertise with Councils across Australia in tourism and event development, strategic planning, branding and marketing, and industry training and mentoring.



Nicole Walker is a respected leader in the Australasian business events industry and Founder of Lightning Bolt Consulting, a strategic advisory firm specialising in event strategy, governance and organisational performance. With over two decades of experience, Nicole brings deep expertise across corporate and business events, event technology and executive leadership.



David Yakas is a transformative leader who blends creativity, authenticity, and innovation to inspire others and deliver meaningful impact. Recognised as a visionary, he has a talent for turning bold ideas into actionable strategies that bring people together, create lasting memories, and drive meaningful change. David's purpose is simple yet profound: to craft moments that matter, inspire others to be their best, and leave a legacy of creativity, connection, and transformation.

SPEAKERS



Geoff Baker is Chief Revenue Officer at Oztix, Australia's leading event ticketing and technology platform. He brings over 20 years of experience leading sales and marketing teams in Australia and UK, Outside of work, he's a passionate sports coach, extensive traveller, pub quiz hustler and is a proud father of three daughters. Geoff has an MBA and a Master of Engineering from Oxford.



Alexandra Buzila has a strong background in volunteering, and volunteer engagement, her career has evolved to focus on accessibility and sustainability. Committed to creating equitable and sustainable experiences for diverse communities, Alexandra is dedicated to driving positive change across the events industry through collaboration, innovation, and inclusive practice.



Amy Byars has built a dynamic career spanning event management, sales, business development, philanthropy and strategic partnerships. Passionate about connecting people through shared experiences, Amy brings a collaborative and strategic approach to building partnerships, delivering events and driving sustainable growth across the arts, culture and events industries.



Anne-Marie Byrne's experience covers leading communications, marketing and event projects across non-profit, corporate, education and local government organisations including at Amnesty International, Oxfam Australia and Planet Ark. She relishes challenges and teamwork and believes that embracing the wisdom and experience of others is the key to innovation and success.



Stephanie Cassimatis is the dynamic force behind Pink Caviar Events, a full-service event management and styling company based in Sydney. With over 15 years of experience in events, tourism, and project management, Stephanie brings creativity, precision, and passion to every project she undertakes. In 2013, Stephanie founded Pink Caviar Events.



Cindy Evelyn Elkhouri is an experienced Event Manager who has led many event projects over the last 20 years in local government. she's also taught Event Management Diploma at TAFE and worked in the private sector. Her motto of 'Delivering Memorable Experiences' has been the driver of achieving successful events and is passionate with connecting with diverse cultures.



Dave George is Data Manager at Oztix. He leads the data and engineering work behind how audiences find, choose and buy tickets – from audience analytics and recommendation systems through to the marketing measurement that tells promoters what actually moved the needle. His focus is on discovery: using event, lineup and listening data to surface events a fan would otherwise never see.



Simon Irwin is Chief Executive Officer of Beef Australia Limited, presenters of the largest cattle show in the Southern Hemisphere. Simon studied journalism before becoming a stock and station agent/auctioneer. During his career he has been the chair of several tourism and development bodies in Queensland and the Northern Rivers region of NSW.



Zachary King is cofounder and CEO of Works, an Australian AI enablement company that helps businesses become AI native. He has spent more than 20 years turning new technology into practical systems that improve how companies operate, sell and deliver. Based on Queensland's Sunshine Coast, he works with businesses across Australia to turn AI from an experiment into part of everyday operations.



Wendy Lacey, Director of TLC Events Co - a Brisbane-based event management company and a recognised leader in event delivery in Queensland. TLC is a proud advocate for sustainable event delivery, with locations including Eat Street Northshore which uses a broad range of waste-reduction initiatives.