

Curriculum Vitae: Aaron Wolowiec

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Brief Biography



Aaron Wolowiec's obsession with learning traces back to preschool, where a knitted purple people eater taught him important life lessons (like cleaning up after yourself). All these years later, Aaron's honed his craft and now designs engaging, multisensory learning and networking experiences for association learners, resulting in the acquisition of new knowledge and skills, the forging of new relationships, and the application of new ideas and perspectives in the workplace.

A serial learner and entrepreneur himself (with an alphabet soup of letters trailing his name), Aaron is nationally recognized for his professional development work with boards, learners, staff, and volunteers. Having launched four successful brands – Event Garde (coincidentally reprising his early fascination with purple), Healthy by Association, Review My Speaker, and FACILIT8me – Aaron's equal parts practitioner and theorist. While the hours are long, Aaron ensures there is no shortage of fun amidst the Slack notifications, email pings, and video chats – from the personal connections he shares with each client, partner, and colleague to the precious moments of free time spent stalking the latest installments of his favorite true crime podcasts and novels.

Employment History

- ⇒ Event Garde LLC | President & Chief Executive Officer (CEO) | December 2011 to Present
 - In the last 10 years, Event Garde has developed and nurtured 20 partnerships, employed 25 talented professionals with a range of experience and skillsets, and served 105 unique clients, including trade associations, individual membership societies, non-profit organizations, and government agencies. | Learn more: <https://bit.ly/3r51RY1>
 - Event Garde's three primary services include:
 - **Meetings** — We've been doing this from the very beginning. Things like creative room sets, interactive food and beverage experiences, accessible audiovisual, and functional signage that's beautifully branded. Whether we're the plug-and-play meetings department or we supplement an organization's full-time staff, we help to identify and fill gaps to meet budget and to satisfy attendees. And, over the years, we've expanded to include meeting and event strategy, virtual/hybrid meeting considerations, pandemic compliance, and the like.
 - **Learning** — While it's true that you can't have a successful in-person event without chicken, chairs, and water, we also care deeply about the content being delivered at association meetings. And we know that while members have a wealth of knowledge about subject matter, they likely are not trained educators (except for maybe the education associations). So,

we partner with associations and their speakers to ensure the presentations they both design and deliver are engaging experiences that support learners in knowledge acquisition and workplace behavior change.

- **Facilitation** — To get the most of association boards, volunteers, staff, and other stakeholders, we've spent a lot of time thinking about, studying, practicing, and evaluating different facilitation methods. Our trained facilitators help navigate a range of important (and often difficult) conversations. These include consensus-building, getting core agreement, and action planning to environmental scanning, strategic planning, and focused implementation. Topics range from diversity, equity, and inclusion; to an underperforming event (or event portfolio); to brand-new initiatives.
 - Additionally, Aaron founded and manages the following three initiatives as supplemental Event Garde brands:
 - **Healthy by Association (HBA)** is a progressive health and wellness movement for people to connect around a shared lifestyle, to set goals and overcome obstacles, to both prioritize and practice self-care, and to inspire each other to not only invest in their health, but to enjoy the journey along the way. | Learn more: <https://bit.ly/2KMksm4>
 - **Review My Speaker (RMS)** is a trusted place to share openly and honestly about speaker experiences, to grow your network of qualified speakers, and to inform better hiring decisions for meetings and events. The online platform is dedicated to verified, honest reviews of speakers from real decision-makers. | Learn more: <https://bit.ly/35rtBbN>
 - **FACILIT8me** offers a relaxed and supportive community of practice ideal for learning and networking with fellow facilitators. Through regular meetups and a vibrant online community, participants of all experience levels are empowered with new resources and greater self-confidence. | Learn more: <https://bit.ly/3H9F9nf>
- ⇒ Health Care Association of Michigan (HCAM) | Director, Education & Associate Partnerships | June 2003 to October 2011
- Planned and facilitated the annual convention and expo; managed the production of all marketing and promotional materials; developed and monitored a budget to meet attendance and revenue targets; and solicited sponsorships from key stakeholders.
 - Promoted professional development through in-person education programs; negotiated and executed program contracts; monitored licensure requirements for Michigan health care professionals; procured continuing education credits; and maintained accurate member records.
 - Developed and coordinated all Web and audio conferences; managed technical support for all virtual education programs; produced electronic marketing and promotional materials; and conducted quality improvement evaluations.

- Liaised with members and vendors; cultivated trustworthy and respectful relationships to build client loyalty; collaborated with executive staff on recruitment and retention efforts; and strategized with the board of directors to foster engagement in regional, state, and national issues.

Education

- ⇒ Central Michigan University (CMU) | Class of 2009 | Master of Science in Administration (MSA), Leadership
- ⇒ Lansing Community College (LCC) | Class of 2006 | Certificate of Achievement, Sign Language Interpreter
- ⇒ Michigan State University (MSU) | Class of 2002 | Bachelor of Arts in Political Theory/Constitutional Democracy (PTCD) and Social Relations (SR)

Professional Qualifications

- ⇒ Health Education Services | June 2021 | Pandemic Compliance Advisor
- ⇒ National Diversity Council (NDC) | September 2020 | Certified Diversity Professional (CDP)
- ⇒ Association for Talent Development (ATD) | March 2019 | Expert Coach
- ⇒ Association for Talent Development (ATD) | January 2019 | Integrated Talent Management Certificate
- ⇒ Institute for Learning Environment Design (iLED) | April 2018 | Certified Learning Environment Architect (CLEA)
- ⇒ Events Industry Council (EIC) | November 2017 | Sustainable Event Professional Certificate
- ⇒ The Institute of Cultural Affairs in the USA (ICA-USA) | July 2017 | Certified Technology of Participation (ToP) Facilitator (CTF) and Mentor Trainer (MT)
- ⇒ Association for Talent Development (ATD) | August 2015 | Master Instructional Designer
- ⇒ Association for Talent Development (ATD) | August 2015 | Learning Transfer Certificate
- ⇒ Tourism Ambassador Institute (TAI) | January 2012 | Certified Tourism Ambassador (CTA)
- ⇒ American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) | January 2010 | Certified Association Executive (CAE)
- ⇒ Events Industry Council (EIC) | January 2009 | Certified Meeting Professional (CMP)

Honors & Awards

- ⇒ Michigan Meetings + Events (MiME) | 2018 | Best Meeting Professional Award
- ⇒ Michigan Society of Association Executives (MSAE) | 2017 | Supplier Partner Award
- ⇒ Events Industry Council (EIC) | 2015 | Top #CMP30 Influencer Award
- ⇒ Michigan Society of Association Executives (MSAE) | 2013 | Rising Leader
- ⇒ Michigan Society of Association Executives (MSAE) | 2011 | Emerging New Leader Award
- ⇒ American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) | 2009-2011 | Diversity Executive Leadership Program (DELP)
- ⇒ Health Care Association of Michigan (HCAM) | 2008 | Chair Award

Professional Memberships

- ⇒ Dallas/Fort Worth Association Executives (DFWAE) | January 2021 to Present | Member of both the Programs & Education Committee and the A-Day Committee, as well as frequent presenter at the annual Association Day
- ⇒ Texas Society of Association Executives (TSAE) | December 2019 to Present | Member, roundtable facilitator, session presenter, author of several published magazine articles, and TSAE board of directors strategic plan facilitator
- ⇒ ToP Network (ToPN) | July 2017 to Present | Member, certified facilitator, mentor trainer, and frequent Annual Gathering presenter
- ⇒ Michigan Society of Association Executives (MSAE) | August 2009 to Present | Member, CAE exam proctor, CMP Prep Course lead instructional/curriculum designer and facilitator, frequent content contributor (e.g., Association Impact) and presenter (i.e., both the annual conference and various stand-alone events/webinars), speaker coach (e.g., Ignite sessions), meeting planning community of practice facilitator, MSAE board of directors strategic plan facilitator, past chair of the Emerging Professionals Committee (EPC), past chair of the ORGPRO Program Committee, and radio show guest/contributor
- ⇒ American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) | August 2008 to Present | Member, Diversity Executive Leadership Program (DELP) scholar, frequent content contributor (e.g., Associations Now) and presenter (e.g., Great Ideas Conference, Annual Meeting), Great Ideas Conference speaker coach and Learning Circle guide, HBA liaison/health and wellness collaborator, past chair of the Professional Development Section Council (PDSC), past chair of the Tours & Guest Activities Committee for the 2015 Detroit Annual Meeting, past chair of the Young Association Executives Committee (YAEC), and Xperience Design Project (XDP) team leader

Volunteer Service

Outside of volunteering with those organizations in which Aaron holds professional membership (noted above), following are two additional representative examples of his volunteer service:

- ⇒ NIGP: The Institute for Public Procurement | July 2015 to February 2020 | Thought Leader on the Talent Council and Liaison to the Leadership Development Committee (LDC) | The Institute's governance structure, known as NIGP 2.0, is comprised of four governing bodies and several committees and taskforces. The Talent Council is one of these governing bodies and is charged with volunteer selection/placement, oversight, recognition, and evaluation.
- ⇒ Michigan Meetings + Events (MiME) | May 2013 to October 2017 | Member on the Editorial Advisory Board (EAB) | The expertise and insights of board members are leveraged in helping to shape a publication that best serves the meeting/event planners and suppliers in Michigan, as well as in selecting the annual Hall of Fame inductees.

Publications

Aaron's most significant publication is the **Meetings, Education & Professional Development Survey Report** released by Event Garde on April 2, 2018, in collaboration with Whorton

Marketing & Research. This project expanded Aaron's previous 2012 research with MSAE to a group of 12 state societies, including Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, New York, South Carolina, Washington, and Wisconsin. The survey was conducted among 1,986 associations during the period of January 25 to February 16. Details about the project, including the summary report, full report, and resulting infographic are available here: <http://bit.ly/2OEpkLj>.

Other notable publications arising from identified needs within the association community include the following four eBooks:

- ⇒ **The Complete Guide to Virtual Event Creation** | The face of associations will forever be changed by COVID-19. As a result, both virtual and hybrid events are likely to remain a significant part of their future value proposition. Because virtual events can vary widely, from a few attendees to a few thousand and from one session to weeks of activities, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to conducting a virtual event. However, Aaron teamed up with Chris Gloede to identify six phases of activities and a 147-item checklist that seem to be common across all virtual programs. | eBook download: <https://bit.ly/32EPZCG>
- ⇒ **Tradeshow (R)evolution** | With so many associations struggling to provide a tradeshow experience that meets the needs of attendees, exhibitors, sponsors, and the association itself, Aaron partnered with Lowell Aplebaum to curate 50 approachable growth strategies to build tradeshow attendance, revenue, and engagement through the lens of experience design. By request, the eBook has evolved into top-rated education sessions for many of the state societies, including CalSAE, FSAE, and TSAE. | eBook download: <http://bit.ly/2KNFINW>
- ⇒ **Engaging Learners: A Guide to Successfully Designing Engaging Learning** | Born out of their own frustrations attending lackluster industry conferences, Aaron collaborated with Tracy King to develop a comprehensive, but approachable resource to help association staff and their speakers better engage learners, resulting in application and behavior change in the workplace. Content from the eBook was featured on the Leading Learning podcast and then went on to become a top 10 podcast episode for 2018. | eBook download: <http://bit.ly/2XDxHuO> | Podcast episode: <https://bit.ly/2DeY6W8>
- ⇒ **8 Steps to Successful Mobile Activation** | Despite our best intentions, the launch of a mobile app can often fail to meet planned expectations. What results, unfortunately, is lost opportunity, revenue, and member/attendee experience. With the help of Kim Harwood, Aaron created an interactive workbook to help make the most of mobile app development and deployment. This user-friendly workbook walks users through an eight-step process to plan mobile activation strategy before, during, and after the launch. | eBook download: <http://bit.ly/2OKwfmq>

In addition to maintaining a popular blog boasting more than 700 posts – which is featured in Alltop and Association Universe – and a monthly newsletter for more than 5,000 active subscribers, Aaron is a regular contributor to Association Adviser, Association Success, Associations Now, BizBash, Meetings & Conventions, and Michigan Meetings + Events, as well as

ASAE, the state societies, and many other associations, including PCMA. Aaron has also developed countless content pieces (seriously!) ranging from social media posts, blog posts, and magazine articles to newsletter articles and radio/podcast episodes on such topics as communication and marketing, diversity and inclusion, event strategy and operations, facilitation, health and wellness, learning, millennials, speakers, tradeshow, and volunteer management. | Blog: <https://bit.ly/2XFCcVC> | News: <https://bit.ly/2pP5g0u>

Presentations

Aaron typically delivers more than 40 presentations a year. Key audiences include a significant majority of the state societies (both large and small), industry organizations focused on learning/meeting professionals (e.g., Connect, MPI, SGMP), the Institute for Organization Management (IOM), and various other trade associations, individual membership societies, non-profit organizations, and government agencies across the United States.

Not surprisingly, Aaron's sessions are never "sit and get." Rather, Aaron role models sound instructional design by creating an intentional and active partnership with the learner to first personalize and process new information (simple exposure is not enough) and to then facilitate application which leads to behavior change in the workplace.

Sessions typically range from 75-minutes to half-day deep dives to multi-day intensives, and topics include association trends, content curation/strategy, diversity and inclusion, engaging learners/learning design, event strategy and operations, experience design/design thinking, facilitation, health and wellness, millennials, speaker selection, sponsorship solicitation, sustainability, tradeshow, under-performing education programs, and volunteer management. | Learn more: <http://bit.ly/2scuoz4>

Facilitation

The importance of strong facilitation skills cannot be underestimated in the association community. Most association professionals are at least periodically charged with some sort of facilitation – ranging from a routine staff meeting to a full-day strategic planning session – and many are not adequately equipped to facilitate productive and action-oriented discussion. The Technology of Participation (ToP) offers a set of structured facilitation methods that transform the way groups think, talk, and work together. These methods recognize and honor contributions from all group members, increase diversity and minimize conflict, create a safer space for all to share their unique perspectives, and often reveal untapped team expertise.

As a Certified ToP Facilitator (CTF) and Mentor Trainer (MT), Aaron is regularly called upon by associations to lead focused conversations that provide for meaningful dialogue. Moreover, he facilitates consensus workshops that build practical team consensus; employs the action planning process to clarify directions, align resources, and designate roles/responsibilities; leverages a range of approaches for environmental scanning; conducts strategic planning in a time- and budget-conscious way; ensures implementation of the best laid/facilitated plans; and gets core agreement from groups around a specific topic or idea.

In a typical year, Aaron trains more than 100 association and hospitality professionals in the ToP methodology alone to help grow their knowledge, skills, and confidence through hands-on practice of the three proven methods introduced during the two-day ToP Facilitation Methods course. Additionally, many more are trained, coached, and mentored on specific topics (e.g., creating participatory environments, facilitation graphics, effective co-facilitation techniques) identified through a facilitator core competencies self-assessment developed by Aaron and his team. | Learn more: <http://bit.ly/2KLv1Wv>

Civic & Community Affairs

- ⇒ Financial donations to organizations of importance to the Event Garde team, including American Cancer Society, ASAE Foundation, ASAE Political Action Committee, Asian Americans Advancing Justice, Children's Miracle Network, Gift of Life Foundation, Michigan Disability Rights Coalition, and Texts to Table.
- ⇒ Annual supporter of the Black Tie Dinner, a formal charity dinner held each year in Dallas, Texas to raise money for the North Texas lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer community.
- ⇒ Member of the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), the largest national lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer civil rights organization representing more than three million members and supporters nationwide.
- ⇒ Volunteer and past chair of the East Lansing Relay for Life, a community-based fundraising event of the American Cancer Society (ACS).
- ⇒ Annual promotion of the #GivingTuesday movement via the Event Garde blog, newsletter, and social media platforms.
- ⇒ Past member and Michigan District leader of both Circle K International, a collegiate service organization affiliated with Kiwanis International, and Key Club International, the oldest and largest student-led service program for high school students.