



Clarence E. Anthony, CEO & Executive Director, National League of Cities; Phyllis Dickerson, CEO of the African American Mayors Association (AAMA); and Eric Kearney, President & CEO, Greater Cincinnati & Northern Kentucky African American Chamber of Commerce, discussed leadership during Leading in Turbulent Times: City Leaders on Navigating Policy Impacts.

Exploration of Civic Leadership Featured at NCBMP Summit

By Todd McElwee

What type of leadership is needed now?

Eric Kearney, President & CEO, Greater Cincinnati & Northern Kentucky African American Chamber of Commerce, posed that question to Clarence E. Anthony, CEO & Executive Director, National League of Cities, and Phyllis Dickerson, CEO of the African American Mayors Association (AAMA); during “Leading in Turbulent Times: City Leaders on Navigating Policy Impacts.”

Held on April 23, the opening plenary session of the National Coalition of Black Meeting Professionals’ (NCBMP) inaugural Kermit J. Hall Leadership Summit explored how federal policy is inter-

preted locally—and what that means for workforce development, capital deployment, and public-private collaboration. The J.W. Marriott Clearwater Beach hosted the summit from April 22–24.

Panelists stressed the importance of civic leadership and the necessity of separating the policies of cities and their governments from federal and state agendas. Finding local allies with similar mindsets, goals and agendas promotes powerful partnerships within destinations, they noted.

Dickerson highlighted how resiliency and innovation have become paramount for today’s leaders. She noted the rise in younger mayors and how developing leaders must have thick skin and be able to “take a lick.”

Anthony emphasized that this is not a time for weak leadership. Leaders have to establish a connection with their staffs, stakeholders and the community while also having clarity of purpose, Anthony said. He shared a story of putting on noise canceling headphones to block out a crying child on a flight and urged attendees to block out the noise and focus on their missions and goals.

Understanding power was a theme throughout. The panelists discussed the changing dynamics of power and how hierarchical structures are becoming outdated. Today’s CEOs and leaders need to recognize that power has to be intentionally and thoughtfully distributed to be truly influential and impactful, they said.

Panelists also urged summit participants to own the social, intellectual and economic power they possess. That notion aligns with the event’s theme of “Stand. Lead. Deliver.”

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Inside

Page 2
A Welcome from Visit St. Pete-Clearwater

Page 4
USAExchange: Jason Dunn, CEO, National Coalition of Black Meeting Professionals

Page 5
Say Hello to Upcoming NCBMP Annual Conference Host Destinations

Page 8
My Tampa: Nadia Colimon, Public Relations Coordinator, Visit Tampa Bay

NEWS

A Welcome from Visit St. Pete-Clearwater



By Brian Lowack, President & CEO, Visit St. Pete-Clearwater

Welcome to America’s Favorite Beaches and our slice of paradise!

We’re thrilled the NCBMP Leadership Conference selected Clearwater Beach as the site for this year’s event. As you can see, this week and every week, St. Pete-Clearwater is not just a premier leisure destination—a favorite for 15 million visitors each year—we also have incredible accommodations and facilities that have elevated our position in the global meetings and business events ecosystem.

Hosting this year’s NCBMP conference of decision makers was a valuable

strategic opportunity for Visit St. Pete-Clearwater (VisitSPC) to showcase our destination to a high-level audience of Presidents, CEO’s, Executive Directors and Association Executives and aligns our brand with decision-makers who move markets and create influence.

Hopefully you’ve been able to experience all that Clearwater Beach has to offer during your time in the destination. Our sugar-white sand beaches continue to be recognized as some of the best across Florida, the United States, and the World.

The relaxed coastal atmosphere is the perfect backdrop for incentive groups, association meetings, and wellness-focused retreats. With its scenic beachfront, plentiful family-friendly activities, tranquil environment, and breathtaking sunsets, Clearwater Beach is ideal for groups prioritizing relaxation, team building, and leisure-driven agendas.

Beyond our award-winning beaches awaits a world of exploration and adventure, offering visitors the perfect fit for their business or pleasure. The combination of the powerhouse communities St. Pete and Clearwater in a single destination combines incredibly complementary experiences with distinctly different offerings.

The lively streets of St. Pete stand out from other coastal Florida destinations with an interactive arts and cultural scene, featuring world-class museums, a walkable and energetic downtown, and a MICHELIN-rated culinary landscape. This makes it especially appealing to corporate meetings, incentive groups, and organizations seeking a more active downtown and creative environment with off-site venue options and unique experiences.

Throughout St. Pete-Clearwater you can find a diverse portfolio of hotel products designed to accommodate a wide range of group segments and provide planners the capability to align their hotel selection with the specific goals, size, and budget of their program.

Luxury and upper-upscale beachfront resorts such as the MICHELIN Guide-Recommended JW Marriott Clearwater Beach Resort & Spa as well as the recently opened Opal Sol and sister properties Opal Sands and Sandpearl along with The Vinoy Resort and Golf Club situated on the downtown St. Pete waterfront offer expansive meeting space, curated food and beverage programs, and premium amenities—ideal for corporate meetings and high-end incentive groups seeking a turnkey experience.

The integrated spa, fitness, and outdoor programming at these marquee properties resonate strongly with groups prioritizing well-be-

ing and balance.

And, as if you couldn’t make perfection any better, our iconic Don CeSar Hotel just opened their new 7,400-sq.-ft. Royal Ballroom, with sweeping views of St. Pete Beach and our beautiful sunsets.

Full-service, well-established resorts like the Hyatt Regency Clearwater Beach—*Condé Nast Traveler* 2025 Readers’ Choice #1 Resort in Florida!—Hilton Clearwater Beach Resort & Spa, Wyndham Grand Clearwater Beach, Clearwater Beach Sheraton Resort on Sand Key and Clearwater Beach Marriott Suites on Sand Key provide flexible meeting space and strong value, making them well-suited for association groups and mid-sized conferences.

Outside our hotels, visitors can find their pleasure on the surrounding waters, in one of our many outdoor concert venues, meandering through our world-renowned museums, or at one of our many sports events.

We hope you depart us with a better understanding of how our destination can serve not only as the backdrop for your event, but also to help define the success of your event as you and your client learn what it means to immerse yourself in the true definition of Beach Culture.



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USAExchange

USAExchange: Jason Dunn, CEO, National Coalition of Black Meeting Professionals



The National Coalition of Black Meeting Professionals, (NCBMP) introduced its Kermit J. Hall Leadership Summit this week in Clearwater Beach, Florida. A few days before kickoff, Jason Dunn, CEO, NCBMP connected with USAE to discuss the event, today's leadership, tomorrow's NCBMP and more.

USAE: Why is this the right time to introduce the Kermit J. Hall Leadership Summit?

Dunn: This is the right time because leadership has fundamentally changed. Today's executives are no longer just managing organizations; they are navigating shifting policies, protecting trust, driving outcomes within a highly volatile economy and making decisions that if not properly thought out could halt their professional futures. Leaders are currently making history in real time and each decision we make, will be judged by future generations.

The Kermit J. Hall Leadership Summit was created to meet that moment in a direct and unapologetic way. It's not a conference, it's a strategic forum designed for leaders operating at scale, where the conversation shifts from theory to execution within relevant circles of expertise and vulnerability. To be direct, our leaders are looking for a place to ask questions, learn from each other and understand best practices. We believe that the Kermit J. Hall Leadership Summit is the answer.

USAE: What is the long-term vision for NCBMP's event portfolio, including

the Kermit J. Hall Leadership Summit?

Dunn: Our long term vision is to build an ecosystem of brands not just events. Brands that have distinct objectives, that are rooted in mission driven key performance indicators (KPI).

Each signature experience within NCBMP's portfolio serves a distinct purpose:

- The **Annual Conference** – NCBMP's annual meeting is the organization's premier gathering, designed to connect, educate, and activate professionals across the meetings, tourism, and hospitality industries

- The **Kermit J. Hall Leadership Summit** – The Kermit J. Hall Leadership Summit is an invitation only convening for CEOs and senior executives responsible for driving growth, navigating complex policies, and shaping industry outcomes.

- **State of Black Tourism** – The State of Black Tourism is NCBMP's platform for defining the economic, cultural, and strategic impact of Black travel and convening power. It brings together industry leaders, destination executives, and policymakers to align around data, opportunity, and accountability.

- **Hospitality Management Summit** (Coming in 2027) – The NCBMP Hospitality Management Leadership Summit will target the convening of middle managers within the hotel, conventions centers, DMO's and emerging executives responsible for delivering performance at the property and within a portfolio.

Over time, our portfolio will function

as a pipeline from emerging leaders to industry architects, ensuring that NCBMP is not just where people gather, but where leadership is developed, activated, and scaled.

USAE: How does NCBMP approach strategic partnerships, and how do they help accelerate NCBMP's growth and influence?

Dunn: We don't pursue partnerships for visibility, we pursue them for alignment. The questions we ask are simple: Does this partner help us move the industry forward in a measurable way? Is there alignment in our missions and can we trust them to keep their word?

When partnerships are aligned in purpose, they don't just support events, they accelerate growth, expand reach, and position NCBMP at the center of conversations that matter.

USAE: What are the strategic priorities for NCBMP for the rest of 2026, and beyond?

Dunn: Our priorities are focused on three things:

- 1. Scaling Influence** – We are positioning NCBMP as a central voice in how meetings, tourism, social policies and economic development intersect, especially as decisions at the federal and municipal levels increasingly impact business strategy.

- 2. Quantifying Impact** – Through our initiatives with Tourism Economics, African American Mayors Association and Miles Partnership, we are focused on proving through data, policies and building our digital infra-

structure, the true economic power of our community and industry.

- 3. Strengthening the Leadership Pipeline** – From emerging professionals to CEOs, we are building intentional pathways that develop leaders who can operate across business, policy, and community impact. Everything we do moving forward ties back to one principle: We are building leaders that understand the industry's power and are unafraid to move us forward collectively.

USAE: How do you think NCBMP will have evolved by the 2031 edition of the Summit?

Dunn: By 2031, the Summit will not just be a moment, it will be a marker.

It will represent:

- Where the most important decisions in our industry are influenced
- Where cross sector leadership, corporate, public and nonprofit come together to align
- Where partnerships are not announced, but activated

NCBMP itself will have evolved into a global platform for leadership, access, and economic opportunity, one that is deeply embedded in how destinations, organizations, and institutions think about growth and inclusion. And the Kermit J. Hall Leadership Summit will be recognized as the room where it all connects, where leadership meets legacy, and where the future of the industry is not discussed... but decided. The future will be bigger than the moment!

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NEWS

Say Hello to Upcoming NCBMP Annual Conference Host Destinations

By Todd McElwee

Mark your calendars, the next five years of National Coalition of Black Meeting Professionals' Annual Conferences are on the books. Leading up to the inaugural Kermit J. Hall Leadership Summit in Clearwater, Florida, USAE reached out to the five upcoming host destinations to get their thoughts on welcoming NCBMP's signature event to town.



Louisville: December 9–12, 2026

"We're truly excited to welcome the National Coalition of Black Meeting Planners to Louisville for its Annual Conference this fall," said Cleo Battle, President & CEO, Louisville Tourism. "This is a meaningful opportunity to connect with industry leaders while strengthening relationships with African American meeting planners and association executives. It's also a chance to showcase Louisville's growth and innovation while reinforcing our ongoing commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion throughout the hospitality industry."



Chicago: December 1–4, 2027
"Choose Chicago is proud to host

the National Coalition of Black Meeting Professionals for their Annual Conference in 2027," said Kristin Reynolds, President & CEO, Choose Chicago. "This event is an incredible opportunity for attendees to experience all that makes Chicago a truly dynamic destination—from our rich cultural heritage and diverse neighborhoods to our world-class dining, arts, and hospitality. Hosting NCBMP also allows us to deepen relationships across the meetings industry and continue advancing our commitment to attracting diverse-led meetings that create meaningful connections and lasting impact across our city. We look forward to welcoming NCBMP members and showcasing Chicago as a place where all visitors—and all communities—are celebrated and can thrive."



Cleveland: Nov. 30–Dec. 2, 2028

"Hosting the 2028 National Coalition of Black Meetings Professionals Conference is an incredible honor," said Gordon Taylor III, Chief Sales

Officer, Destination Cleveland. "As a diverse and welcoming city that embraces visitors like no other, this an exciting opportunity to showcase the varied perspectives that shape our city. We're looking forward to showing NCBMPC attendees what makes Cleveland stand out—from our world-class meetings and conventions facilities to our diversity, creativity and contagious passion."



Denver: December 5–8, 2029

"Denver is excited to welcome planners and attendees for the National Coalition of Black Meeting Professionals' annual conference in 2029," said Richard Scharf, President & CEO, Visit Denver. "As a city committed to equity and opportunity, we are proud to host events that bring people together and elevate diverse voices. From Michelin-recognized restaurants and world-class venues to stunning Rocky Mountain views, Denver is committed to delivering a welcoming and exceptional experience for every attendee."



Baltimore: December 4–7, 2030

"As someone who has had the privilege of working closely with the National Coalition of Black Meeting Professionals for many years, I am thrilled that Baltimore will serve as the host city for the 2030 Annual Conference," said Kireem Swinton, President & CEO, Visit Baltimore. "We take a lot of pride in how we show up for our visitors, and hosting NCBMP is a meaningful opportunity for our entire community. Baltimore is a city driven by its people—our neighborhoods, small businesses, and artists all play a role in creating an experience that makes people feel welcome. We're excited for attendees to connect with that energy and experience everything our city has to offer."



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NEWS

My Tampa: Nadia Colimon, Public Relations Coordinator, Visit Tampa Bay



With the National Coalition of Black Meeting Professionals' (NCBMP) inaugural Kermit J. Hall Leadership Summit coming to area, Colimon connected with USAE to share some personal favorites and local insights to help visitors make the most of their time in Tampa.

When I need coffee, my first stop is [Chef & the Baker](#). The café is owned by a dynamic duo: Chef Rosana River, who is a [Beat Bobby Flay](#) champion, and the other—Chef Ricardo Castro—has been featured on Disney+'s [Foodtastic](#). Beyond their creative, house-made coffee flavors, their freshly baked pastries and donuts alone are worth the trip.

One place I always take a first-time visitor is the [Tampa Riverwalk](#). Stretching along the Hillsborough River, it is the perfect way to take in the city's energy and waterfront views. Start near Armature Works, pass Curtis Hixon Park, and make your way to Sparkman Wharf, stopping at one of the many attractions, bars, or restaurants along the way. Go at sunset or after dark when the lights bring the

whole path to life.

I can't resist a pastry from [Psomi](#). This Greek-inspired bakery turns out fresh breads and pastries daily in a bright, welcoming space. Everything is beautifully done, but the croissant cinnamon roll is the one I keep coming back for.

The most peaceful spot in Tampa is a genuine piece of Cuban territory. Tucked in historic Ybor City, [José Martí Park](#) honors the poet, journalist, and revolutionary who fought for Cuba's independence. Frequenting Ybor City's free-roaming chickens, the park features a striking Martí statue and soil from across Cuba, and it's officially owned by the Cuban people, making it one of the only pieces of Cuba in the United States.

[Ybor City](#) is often overlooked but worth visiting. From historic cigar shops to charming brick streets, unique businesses, and a flock of resident chickens—few places in the world are as charming as Ybor City. Ybor put Tampa on the map as the cigar capital of the world. Today, this vibrant community is Tampa's most

historic neighborhood and home to the J.C. Newman Cigar Company, the oldest family-owned premium cigar maker in America. Ybor is a place where character is waiting to be discovered around every corner.

My favorite Cuban sandwich in town is at [The Columbia Restaurant](#). A Tampa institution, it is the oldest restaurant in Florida and is considered the birthplace of the Cuban Sandwich. Staying true to their 1915 recipe, this iconic sandwich is pressed on fresh Cuban bread from La Segunda, offering a crispy bite that's rich in local tradition. It's a delicious journey through Tampa Bay's past, making it a must-try for anyone visiting the destination.

If I have 30 minutes for lunch, I head to [Supernatural Food and Wine](#). This small downtown spot is all about well-crafted sandwiches. In the morning, I go for the Bacon, Egg + Cheddar, and later in the day it is hard to pass up the Italian Stallion. No matter what you choose to eat, it's never lacking in flavor.

Do not miss the [Tampa Bay History Center](#). Located at the start of the Tampa Riverwalk, the Tampa Bay History Center stands in the top tier nationwide for visitor experience, collections care, and overall excellence. Inside, three floors unfold the story of Florida and the Tampa Bay region across 12,000 years. Hands-on galleries, short films, and smart interactives invite you to slow down and follow the people and places that shaped this coast. The Touchton Map Library offers a rare look at cartography that changed how the world saw Florida.

For shopping, I always recommend [Hyde Park Village](#). Set in a historic district that offers a distinguished blend of retail and dining within a dynamic lifestyle center, it blends well-known brands with local boutiques such as Anthropology, Coastal Cowgirl Collective, The Candle Pour, and Lululemon, all in an open-air setting. It is an easy place to wander, shop, and take a break at one of the nearby restaurants.



Tampa Bay Historic Center

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