

Building the Next Generation Workforce for the Events Industry

How Mentorship Builds Our Future

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annual meeting
& exhibition
2025

#expoexpo



Warwick Davies
President and Founder
The Annabelle Project

↑ the
place
to be

The Industry at an Inflection Point

- Innovation in events is accelerating
- Talent pipeline is not keeping pace with **skill loss**
- We are **not attracting** the best students
- Risk: losing relevance, resilience, and creativity

The Challenge

👁 Awareness Gap

- Most college students—especially those at HBCUs and Hispanic-serving institutions—**don't know the events industry exists as a career path.**
- Without visibility, the sector misses out on a huge pool of capable, diverse, and motivated young professionals.

🚪 Access Gap

- Even when students are interested, they lack **structured entry points** such as internships, mentorship, and exposure to real-world projects.
- The industry often recruits through **existing networks**, unintentionally excluding underrepresented talent.

⚙ Skills Gap

- The events business has evolved rapidly—data analytics, digital engagement—yet most curricula haven't caught up.
- Event organizations are struggling to find candidates with **modern, tech-savvy skillsets** who also understand events.

Why It Matters

Sustainability of the Industry

- Without new talent, the events industry risks an **aging workforce** and a shortage of next-generation leaders.
- Innovation stalls when organizations recycle the same people and ideas.
- Investing in young professionals ensures **continuity, adaptability, and growth**.

Innovation and Competitiveness

- New professionals bring **fresh perspectives, digital fluency, and social awareness** that older generations may lack.
- The industry needs these voices to stay competitive in areas like **AI and community building**.
- Doing nothing risks **falling behind faster-moving industries** for top talent.

Why It Matters

✖ Diversity as a Business Advantage

- A diverse workforce creates **richer ideas, broader audiences, and stronger brands.**
- Research consistently shows that diversity drives **higher performance and profitability.**
- By investing in underrepresented students, The Annabelle Project (TAP) helps the industry **mirror the audiences it serves.**

🏆 Social Impact and Legacy

- Mentorship and access programs like TAP are not just workforce strategies—they are **acts of social responsibility.**
- Executives who champion this build **lasting legacies** and elevate the reputation of their organizations.
- The next generation will remember who opened doors for them.

The Opportunity



Our Story



The Annabelle Project (TAP) is a deeply personal mission inspired by the extraordinary bond between me and my daughter. TAP is my response to this call: an ambitious initiative designed to break down barriers, bridge divides, and open new pathways. Through meaningful connections and immersive learning experiences, TAP seeks to nurture talent, foster growth, and create opportunities that shape a more inclusive future within the events industry.



Warwick Davies, Founder of TAP and family

Annabelle Davies



The Mission



The Annabelle Project is a mentorship program that connects experienced event industry professionals with college-aged students of color for a year-long, guided experience. The program's mission is to provide mentees with individualized mentorship, expert insight, and access to professional networks and work opportunities that support career advancement. Targeting applicants from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and institutions with large Hispanic concentrations, the initiative seeks to cultivate emerging talent, foster career readiness, and tap into an underrepresented pool of professionals who will help shape the future of the events industry.



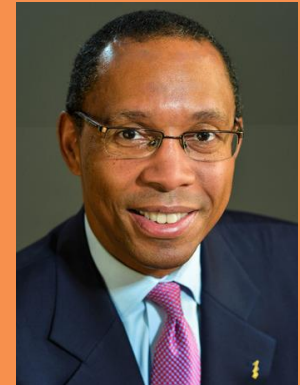
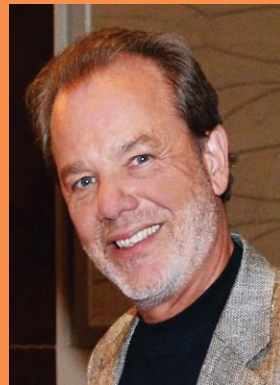
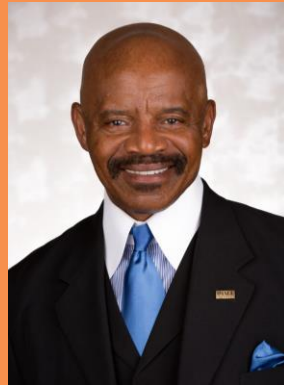
The Annabelle Project Impact



TAP SUPPORTED 57+ COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY STUDENTS TO DATE

Mentors

MORE THAN 56 INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS ARE TAP MENTORS



How TAP Mentorship Works

- Ask an Industry Executive if they are willing to help a student.
- Partner with colleges and universities to identify candidates.
- Educate the college about the **events industry** and its career pathways.
- Encourage students to **apply** for the mentorship program.
- Match each student with a mentor who has **relevant, similar experience** for a 12-month program.
- Provide a **comprehensive year-long experience**, including upskilling, internships, and volunteer opportunities.
- Offer **honest, constructive feedback** to help students build confidence and competence.
- Prepare students to become the **strongest candidate** for any role they pursue.

Student Impact

“When I first heard about **The Annabelle Project**, I wasn’t sure what to expect. As a senior at **Jarvis Christian University**, I knew I wanted to build a career, I just didn’t know where to begin. I didn’t have many connections who understood what that path looked like.

Then I was matched with Sharon and everything changed. From our very first conversation, she made me feel seen, supported, and capable. She often jokes that I’m “her kid for 2025,” but honestly, she’s become so much more than a mentor, she’s family.

Sharon has helped me believe in myself in new ways. She’s opened my eyes to what’s possible, helped me build confidence in my abilities, and connected me to people and opportunities I never imagined I’d have access to. Her guidance has made me feel like I truly belong in the events industry.

Through The Annabelle Project’s support, I’ve learned that mentorship isn’t just about career advice, it’s about empowerment, belief, and being part of a community that lifts you higher. This experience has changed how I see my future. It’s given me hope, direction, and the courage to chase my dreams.” –Diamond, TAP Mentee



Mentor Benefits

1. Professional Growth

- Mentors sharpen their **leadership and coaching skills**, especially around communication, empathy, and constructive feedback.
- The act of guiding students helps mentors **clarify their own expertise and purpose**, which can translate to better performance in their own organizations.
- Many mentors report that the experience reignites their enthusiasm for the events industry.

2. Expanded Network

- Mentors join a **vibrant community of industry peers** who also believe in lifting up the next generation.
- Through TAP events and shared initiatives, they develop **cross-company and cross-generational relationships** that can lead to new collaborations and business opportunities.

3. Personal Fulfillment

- Mentors experience the **emotional reward of giving back**—seeing their mentees gain confidence, secure internships, and land jobs in the industry.
- Many describe it as “the most meaningful professional activity” they do outside of work.
- It also deepens their connection to building better representation in action—not theory.

4. Industry Impact

- Mentors help shape a **stronger, more diverse talent pipeline** for the events industry.
- By modeling engagement, they set a standard for **responsible leadership and legacy-building** in the profession.

Lessons Learned

Meet Students Where They Are

- Students at institutions often lack direct exposure to the events industry.
- TAP discovered that **on-campus engagement, professor partnerships, and peer referrals** work better than cold outreach from behind a computer or in committee meetings.

Lesson: *Proximity builds trust and access.*

Diversity Drives Innovation

- The diversity of TAP mentees—across race, gender, and background—sparked **new perspectives** that mentors found energizing.
- TAP learned that mentorship is a **two-way street**: mentors grow as much as mentees.

Lesson: *Inclusion isn't charity—it's a strategy for industry renewal.*

Visibility Creates Momentum

- Student success stories and shared wins drive further participation.
- TAP found that **public recognition** of mentor and mentee achievements strengthens engagement and recruitment.

Lesson: *Showcasing outcomes inspires more mentors/mentees to join.*

Partnerships with Colleges

The Annabelle Project student mentees represent a broad list of colleges and universities including:



Actionable Strategies

1. Build Strategic University Partnerships

- Identify **institutions** aligned with your event domains (marketing, hospitality, business, or tech).
- Co-create **course modules, workshops, or guest lectures** with TAP mentors.
- Sponsor student attendance at key industry events (like Expo! Expo!).

Action Tip: Assign one team member as a *University Liaison* to manage and nurture these relationships.

2. Establish a Mentorship Culture at Your Organization

- Encourage staff to volunteer as TAP mentors (commitment: 1 hour/month).
- Recognize mentors publicly during company meetings or newsletters.

Action Tip: Add mentorship participation as a **recognized leadership metric** in annual reviews.

3. Create an Internship-to-Career Pathway

- Work with TAP to develop **structured internships** that align with real projects.
- Include cross-functional exposure—marketing, sales, operations—to maximize learning.
- Offer internships with a clear route to **entry-level roles or continued mentorship**.

Action Tip: Launch one “*TAP Fellowship*” each year as your flagship student program.

Actionable Strategies

4. Invest in Sponsorship & Support

- Sponsor TAP's **student travel grants** or mentoring resources to expand reach.
- Provide **event access passes or content opportunities** for TAP mentees.
- Use your platform to **amplify TAP stories**—highlight your organization's commitment to industry growth.

Action Tip: Tie TAP sponsorship to **your company's initiatives** to secure budget/leadership buy-in.

5. Join the TAP Leadership Network

- Participate in the **TAP** to share best practices and shape the future of workforce development in the events industry.
- Collaborate with peer organizations to co-host **career readiness workshops or "Industry Days."**
- Advocate for mentorship-driven hiring practices across the sector.

Action Tip: Position your company as a *founding supporter* of industry transformation through TAP.

Call to Action

- Who will build the next generation with us?
- Who will help the events industry compete for the best students?
- Who will help equip these students to be the best candidates?

This is the work to be done....



Here is the future...

TM





The Annabelle Project

Scan here
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us:



“We believe in the extraordinary power of diversity and the profound impact it will have on the events and hospitality business. We will champion opportunity in the events and hospitality industry workforce by empowering young professionals from diverse backgrounds with the advice, skills and connections essential for success. Our vision is to make the event industry as diverse as the audiences it serves.” – Warwick Davies, Founder and President



annabelleproject.org