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ASIAN KALEIDOSCOPE

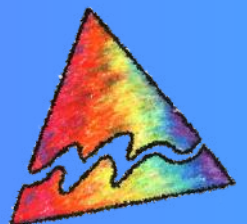
MN BIZ VISION



Interview with Fran de Leon and Anh Thu T. Pham - Theater Mu: Reclaiming the Stage for Asian American Stories

Calling America HOME Series with Dr. Narayan P. Dhakal

The Future of Well-Being: Why Neuro Wellness Is the Next Big Shift



Asian Media Access

This monthly e-Magazine is published by Asian Media Access and Multi Cultural Community Alliance to highlight the accomplishments of Asian American and Pacific Islanders' (AAPI) small businesses in MN.

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Bridging Cultures, Building Futures: Minnesota's AAPI Business & Workforce Magazine

Welcome to **MN Biz Vision: Asian Kaleidoscope**, a monthly e-magazine dedicated to empowering Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities across Minnesota. More than a publication, this platform uplifts AAPI entrepreneurs while advancing workforce pathways through the **Center for Wellness Technology** - a visionary hub that integrates Agricultural Technology, Multimedia Technology, and Wellness Technology into culturally grounded IT career opportunities.

AAPI Entrepreneurship & the Need for New Pathways

AAPI entrepreneurs are vital to Minnesota's diverse business landscape, operating successful restaurants, grocery stores, salons, healthcare practices, consulting firms, and manufacturing businesses, etc.. While AAPIs comprise 6% of Minnesota's population, Asian-owned businesses represent only 3% of the state's small businesses—revealing persistent barriers to entrepreneurship. Yet these 15,500+ Asian-owned firms account for 35% of all minority-owned businesses in Minnesota, demonstrating the community's outsized economic impact and resilience. Targeted workforce development in specialized IT sectors can help bridge this entrepreneurship gap and create new pathways for community economic mobility and innovation.

The Center for Wellness Technology: Our Dual Mission

At the heart of MN Biz Vision stands the Center for Wellness Technology, which unifies three high-impact technology tracks designed for AAPI youth, families, and entrepreneurs:

- **Agricultural Technology (AgTech):** Blending modern engineering with ancestral agricultural knowledge, learners explore aeroponics, aquaponics, vertical farming, and sustainable food systems that support food sovereignty and sustainability.
- **Multimedia Technology:** Youth and creatives gain experience in game design, AR/VR development, digital storytelling, and AI-assisted media production—tools that amplify AAPI voices and ensure cultural stories are represented in the digital future.
- **Wellness Technology:** Integrating traditional healing practices with modern innovations, the Center supports healing with telehealth systems, VR calming room designs, and culturally informed wearable devices, advancing non-invasive and holistic care models.

Together, these tracks demonstrate why IT matters: technology becomes a vehicle for economic mobility, cultural preservation, and community innovation.

What You'll Discover Each Month

Every issue of MN Biz Vision highlights AAPI business owners across diverse sectors, celebrates immigrant and refugee success stories, and shares practical resources on financing, marketing, digital tools, and entrepreneurship. Workforce development features dive into emerging IT opportunities within AgTech, Multimedia, and Wellness Technology, supported by training programs and employer partnerships.

Building Economic Opportunity & Cultural Resilience

Whether you are strengthening a family business, exploring a career transition, entering tech fields, or launching a new venture, MN Biz Vision: Asian Kaleidoscope connects you to the networks, knowledge, and inspiration needed to thrive. Join us each month as we celebrate AAPI excellence - honoring cultural traditions while embracing the technological innovations shaping Minnesota's future.





THEATER MU: RECLAIMING THE STAGE FOR ASIAN AMERICAN STORIES

In the heart of the Midwest, Theater Mu stands as a powerful force for storytelling, representation, and community. Founded in 1992, the company has grown into the largest Asian American theater organization in the region—built on a mission to tell authentic stories, produce meaningful art, and center social justice in its work.

Today, that mission is carried forward by Artistic Director Fran de Leon and Managing Director Anh Thu T. Pham, two leaders whose personal journeys deeply shape the organization’s direction.

A Mission Rooted in Identity and Community

Theater Mu was founded by Asian American artists seeking to create space for stories that had long been absent from American theater. That purpose continues to guide its work today.

For Pham, a refugee and immigrant, the role is deeply personal. Raised with a strong sense of service instilled by her parents, she has long been committed to giving back to her community—whether through teaching, organizing, or advocacy. Leading Theater Mu allows her to continue that work on a larger scale, supporting immigrant and refugee communities across Minnesota.

De Leon’s path is equally rooted in identity. A child of immigrants who spent part of her early life in the Philippines, she describes herself as “1.5 generation”—someone who carries both cultural closeness and lived American experience. Her journey

toward embracing her identity has come full circle in her leadership at Theater Mu, where she now helps shape stories that reflect the complexity of Asian American life.



Fifty Boxes of Earth made its world premiere at Theater Mu in 2025. Written by Ankita Raturi, directed by kt shorb, and featuring choreography by Ananya Chatterjea and puppet design by Oanh Vu and Andrew Young, the play follows an immigrant who grows fantastical, beautiful flowers in the community garden—to the delight of a neighborhood girl and the distrust of her father. From L to R: Alyssa Taiber, Eliana Durnbaugh, Kiko Laureano, Taylor West, & Che’Li



Blended 和 (Harmony), made its world premiere in a co-commission and co-production by Theater Mu and History Theatre in 2024. Created by Jessica Huang and Jacinth Greywoode, directed by Lily Tung Crystal, and choreographed by Rush Benson, the musical follows the real story of four Polish Chinese American sisters who went from Minneapolis to Broadway and beyond during the swing era. The story was inspired by Leslie Li’s book *Just Us Girls* and *The Kim Loo Sisters* documentary. From L to R: Boomer Xiong, Morgan Kempton, Audrey Mojica, Suzie Juul, & Kyle Camay

Leading Through Uncertainty

Both leaders stepped into their roles during challenging times. Pham joined in 2020, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, while De Leon transitioned to Minnesota in 2025 during a period of heightened immigration enforcement.

These experiences pushed them to think beyond theater as performance alone. Instead, they asked: How can an arts organization support its community during times of crisis?

That question continues to define their leadership—grounding Theater Mu not just as a cultural institution, but as a community-centered organization.

Representation Beyond a Single Story

One of the ongoing challenges they face is representing the vast diversity within the Asian American community.

“There isn’t just one story,” De Leon emphasizes. With limited resources, the company must carefully balance its programming to reflect a wide range of voices without reducing communities to a single narrative.

Pham adds that authentic storytelling also depends on who gets to tell those stories. Many Asian American communities have historically encouraged “safe” career paths, leaving fewer opportunities for artists to emerge. In response, Theater Mu has built strong mentorship and education programs to support the next generation of creatives.

Their “Pay As You Are” ticketing model also ensures accessibility, allowing more community members to see themselves reflected on stage.

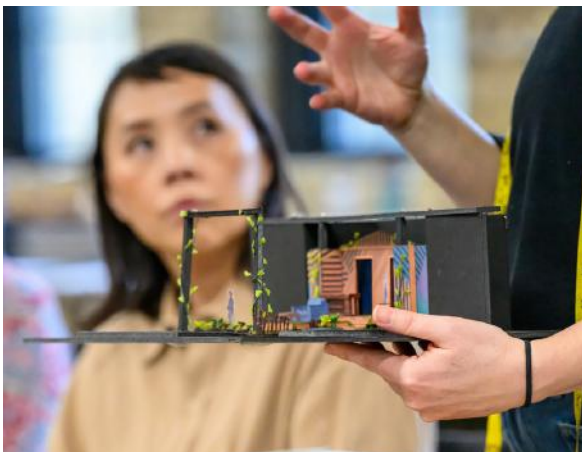
Building Pathways and Earning Trust

Both leaders point to relationships—within families, communities, and the organization itself—as central to their proudest achievements.

For De Leon, it’s both personal and professional: raising an artist’s son and creating opportunities for emerging theater professionals. This season, Theater Mu has continued to expand its paid fellowship programs, pairing early-career artists with experienced mentors and building pathways into the industry.

For Pham, a defining moment came during a difficult period in her life when her parents expressed unwavering support for her activism and choices. That affirmation continues to guide her work today.

Equally meaningful is the trust Theater Mu has built with its artists. As Pham recalls, one artist shared that they give feedback because they know the company listens—and acts on it. That responsiveness has become a cornerstone of the organization’s culture.



a close-up of an initial set model for
"HMong Futures: The Future of Us"



(L to R) stage manager Haley Walsh and director Reena Dutt looking at
an example of a crepe leaf that could adorn the set

Balancing Culture and Growth

At Theater Mu, cultural identity is not something to be set aside—it’s something to be honored.

Pham notes that the organization actively respects cultural traditions, such as observing Lunar New Year and accommodating artists’ holidays. De Leon reflects on a quote that has stayed with her: Culture is neither a burden nor a crutch, but something to carry with strength and pride.

This philosophy is reflected in their programming, including works like Katie Ka Vang's *HMong Futures: The Future of Us*, which explores intergenerational healing and resilience among Hmong women.



L to R: Melody Her and Sharon Omi, who play Maly and her grandmother, Zong from *HMong Futures*



L to R: Sharon Omi and Greg Watanabe, who play Zong and Unclefriend from *HMong Futures*

Looking Ahead

Despite challenges in arts funding and a shifting economy, both leaders remain focused on growth and sustainability.

De Leon envisions a future with expanded programming, larger productions, and a stronger presence in schools. Pham echoes that vision, emphasizing the importance of a thriving and safe Asian American arts community.

Above all, they believe in the power of community to carry them forward.

As Theater Mu prepares for the world premiere of *HMong Futures: The Future of Us*, running April 9–May 3 at the Gremlin Theatre in Saint Paul, they invite audiences not only to witness a story, but to be part of a shared experience of healing, connection, and cultural celebration. You can learn more and get your “Pay As You Are” tickets at theatermu.org.



HMONG FUTURES

by **KATIE KA VANG**

Apr 9 - May 3, 2026
Gremlin Theatre



Dr. Narayan P. Dhakal

Series Preface: Asian Media Access proudly presents “Calling America HOME” Series, which is inspired by the resilience and hope shared by immigrants and refugees from all corners of the world who have rebuilt their lives in Minnesota. Through these stories, we invite readers to witness a legacy of survival, determination, and hope against impossible odds.

In this edition, we shine a spotlight on Nepali entrepreneur Dr. Narayan P. Dhakal, a visionary who bridges cultures through SOIL. Discover how his journey intertwines innovation, heritage, and a deep connection with nature

THE SOIL THAT KNOWS MY NAME: A NEPALI IMMIGRANT’S JOURNEY

Q1. Thank you for speaking with AMA. Can you begin by introducing yourself and describing your journey to Minnesota?

I am Narayan P. Dhakal, a transcendental farmer and ecological scholar investigating the relationship between human consciousness, biodiversity, and sustainable agriculture through urban farming, diversity knowledge systems, and environmental education. My journey to Minnesota began through my work in community-based natural resource conservation. Before coming to the United States, I was actively engaged in mobilizing rural communities to conserve and sustainably utilize natural resources for the benefit of both local livelihoods and the planet. Through these efforts, my work drew the attention of conservation leaders and academic partners who recognized its impact. As a result, the Save the Tiger Fund and Professor James L.D. Smith from the University of Minnesota decided to support my admission to the University. Their encouragement



and sponsorship created an opportunity for me to further strengthen my knowledge and skills in environmental stewardship and sustainable resource management. With this support, I arrived in Minnesota and began my academic journey at the University of Minnesota.

My original plan was clear: to return to my roots and continue educating and empowering communities to use natural resources sustainably. I envisioned applying the knowledge gained at the University to strengthen conservation efforts and community resilience in my native land. However, unexpected challenges within the U.S. immigration system changed the course of my journey. Instead of returning home as planned, I found myself stranded in the United States, navigating complex immigration barriers. Like many Asian immigrants in today's environment, I have faced significant struggles—uncertainty, limited opportunities, and the challenge of rebuilding stability in a system that is often difficult to navigate.



Despite these obstacles, my commitment to environmental stewardship and community empowerment remains strong. My work and aspirations continue to be rooted in the belief that sustainable management of natural resources is essential for the well-being of both people and the planet.

Q2. Please share more with us – How did your own cultural identity evolve while working in supporting other entrepreneurs? How has that work shaped your sense of belonging in both Nepali and American cultures?

My cultural identity has evolved significantly through my work supporting entrepreneurs and communities. Growing up in Nepal, I was raised in a farming environment where food production was deeply connected to nature. Agriculture was not simply an economic activity—it was part of a circular system where soil, water, forests, animals, and people were integrated. This upbringing shaped my worldview and gave me an innate understanding that economic activity and environmental stewardship must go hand in hand.



Central Park Roseville, Minnesota, USA, Fall 2025

The Soil That Knows My Name: A Nepali Immigrant's Journey

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When I began working with entrepreneurs in the United States, particularly in diverse communities, I realized that this traditional ecological perspective could offer

valuable insights into contemporary economic systems. Many modern business models in the United States are driven by large corporate structures that prioritize short-term profit over long-term sustainability. My experience supporting entrepreneurs has strengthened my belief that business can be responsible, community-centered, and environmentally conscious. As an Asian immigrant, I see this as an opportunity to bring my cultural understanding into conversations about responsible business and sustainable development. I value a business culture where both industry and consumers share responsibility for protecting the natural environment. Entrepreneurship, in my view, should not only generate profit but also cultivate shared values—respect for nature, ethical production, and education of future generations about sustainable living.



Working with entrepreneurs has also shaped my sense of belonging in both Nepali and American cultures. My Nepali roots continue to ground me in traditional knowledge, especially the idea that humans are part of nature rather than separate from it. At the same time, my experience in the United States has exposed me to innovation, diverse ideas, and entrepreneurial energy. These two worlds have influenced me to see sustainability not as a nostalgic return to the past, but as a bridge between traditional ecological wisdom and modern innovation. Ultimately, I believe nature provides every individual the opportunity to live independently and responsibly on this planet. Our challenge is to craft ways of living and doing business that are more ecological, preserving traditional knowledge while adapting it to modern contexts. These practices are not meant only for one generation—they are meant to sustain life and opportunity for generations to come. By integrating cultural wisdom with responsible entrepreneurship, we can create systems that benefit both people and the planet.

Q3. How do you balance cultural authenticity while making your work accessible to others who may not be familiar with Nepali traditions?



Balancing cultural authenticity with accessibility begins with focusing on the universal values that connect people across cultures. Growing up in Nepal, I was deeply rooted in a farming lifestyle where daily life was closely tied to nature. Agriculture was not just about producing food—it was about living within a system where soil, water, plants, animals, and people were interconnected. This experience shaped my cultural identity and my understanding of sustainability.

When sharing this perspective with people who may not be familiar with Nepali traditions, I focus on common ground—simplicity, respect for the environment, and the human connection to nature. These values transcend culture and geography. On a farm, for example, anyone can experience the same sensory connection with the natural world: the smell of soil after it is turned, worms moving through the earth, birds chirping nearby, and butterflies and bees flying from flower to flower, nourishing the environment. These experiences are universal and help people understand the deeper philosophy behind traditional ecological knowledge.

By sharing stories and practical experiences rather than only cultural explanations, I make these ideas accessible while maintaining authenticity. People may not know Nepali farming traditions, but they can understand the feeling of working with the land and witnessing the life it supports. In this way, my work becomes a bridge between cultures. I remain grounded in my Nepali heritage and its respect for nature, while inviting others to see that these principles are not limited to one culture—they are part of a shared human responsibility to care for the Earth and sustain life for future generations.



Q4. You have accomplished so much – from arriving in the States to becoming a cultural bearer. What were some of the pivotal challenges you faced in building your life in America?

Although my journey in the United States has been meaningful and full of learning, it has also been marked by significant challenges. One of the most difficult realities many immigrants face today is uncertainty within the immigration system. Even individuals who have legal rights to stay in the country often feel vulnerable, unsure of

how policies and enforcement may affect their lives. This creates an atmosphere of anxiety that can make it difficult to fully settle and contribute.

Another challenge has been navigating cultural differences. As immigrants of different backgrounds, languages, and skin colors, we often come from social systems that operate very differently from the dominant culture in the United States. Understanding the laws, expectations, and institutions of a new country takes time. While it is often said that ignorance of the law is not an excuse, it is equally important that people are given fair and accessible opportunities to understand those laws and the systems that govern them.



For many immigrants, the process can feel like constant vetting, as if they must continually prove their worth or legitimacy. Yet immigrants bring knowledge, skills, and cultural wisdom that can benefit the broader society. In my own experience, many immigrants from Asia and Africa come from farming backgrounds or carry deep generational knowledge about working with the land. Agriculture has been part of their cultural and economic foundation for generations. The United States has tremendous natural resources and agricultural land. If immigrant communities were supported and connected to farming opportunities and market systems, they could contribute significantly to food production, local economies, and environmental stewardship.



For me, **working on the farm, digging soil, producing food, and merging with the environment provides a kind of quantum citizenship that cannot be achieved through systems of dominance or division.** Rather than being viewed only through the lens of labor or suspicion, immigrants could be recognized as partners in building resilient and sustainable communities.



Despite the challenges, these experiences have strengthened my commitment to bridging cultures, advocating for fair opportunities, and promoting sustainable practices that benefit both people and the land. I continue to believe that when individuals are respected and given the opportunity to contribute their knowledge and skills, they can play an important role in strengthening the future of this country.

Q5. Love your statement “merging with the environment provides a kind of quantum citizenship that cannot be achieved through systems of dominance or division.” Reflecting on that journey, what impacts do you hope having on the next generation?

Yes, I often reflect on that belief which guides my work: ***“In simplicity, working on the farm, digging soil, producing food, and merging with the environment provides a kind of quantum citizenship that cannot be achieved through systems of dominance or division.”***



Reflecting on my journey—from my roots in Nepal to building a life in the United States—I hope to inspire the next generation to reconnect with the values that sustain both humanity and the planet. Too often, modern systems measure success through power, status, or control. But real belonging comes from understanding our relationship with the Earth and with one another.

My hope is that young people will see dignity in working with the land that nourishing life, so they can experience a deeper form of citizenship—one rooted not in

documents or borders, but in responsibility and care for the planet.

For the next generation, I hope to pass on the idea that sustainable living, humility, and respect for nature are not outdated traditions. They are essential foundations for the future. By combining traditional ecological wisdom with modern innovation, young people can create communities that are more just, resilient, and environmentally responsible. Ultimately, I want the next generation to understand that true belonging comes not from dominance or exclusion, but from stewardship—caring for the land, respecting diverse cultures, and building a world where both people and nature can thrive.

Q6. Any final words for our readers?

“LET US PLANT THE SEED of TRUTH – TRUTH to GERMINATE, TRUTH to GROW, TRUTH to FLOWER, TRUTH to FRUIT AND TRUTH to SEED AGAIN”

Please review the research papers below for additional insights into Asian philosophies on a sustainable future.

https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Narayan-Dhakal?ev=hdr_xprf

<https://dhakal-contact.medium.com>

Also please check out my blog at – <https://www.patreon.com/cw/u36465585>, and join me in being part of the stewardship.





Photo Courtesy: Northern Lighting

LIGHT AS MEDICINE

How Immersive Light, Infrared Heat & Fiber Optic Environments Heal the Human Body and Mind

Step into a darkened room where thousands of LED lighting strands cascade from ceiling to floor like luminous rain, each filament pulsing with slow, breathing violet and blue light. The space is quiet. The light is soft. Within minutes, shoulders release, breathing deepens, and children who arrived restless and overwhelmed grow peacefully still. This is immersive light experience – a rapidly growing field at the intersection of art, architecture, and human wellbeing that is redefining what a calming, restorative environment can look and feel like.

Inspired by pioneering art collectives like teamLab in Japan, whose immersive nature-light environments have brought tens of millions of visitors to stillness and wonder around the world, the 5D Immersion Lab and Center for Wellness Technology at 3D Wellness Hub in St. Paul – developed by Asian Media Access – draw on distinct light-based environments to support wellbeing across every dimension: physical, emotional, cognitive, and social.



Immersive Light Exhibition at the 5D Immersion Lab – Wonder as the First Step to Calm

The centerpiece of the 5D Immersion Lab is a large-format immersive light environment where floor, walls, and ceiling become a

continuous field of light, color, and gentle movement. The space uses projection mapping, LED arrays, and responsive sensors to create an environment that visitors do not simply observe but genuinely inhabit.

Slow-cycling blue and violet light has a naturally settling effect on the body – slowing the breath, softening tension, and creating a felt sense of safety and openness. When walls shimmer with gradual, flowing color and light responds gently to a visitor's presence, something in us relaxes. Researchers call this state awe – a recognized condition of quiet wonder associated with reduced anxiety, greater social warmth, and a renewed sense of connection to the world around us.

For children with ADHD or sensory sensitivities, immersive light offers something many environments cannot: a space that welcomes an active, restless nervous system rather than asking it to sit still and conform. The light does not instruct or demand. It simply surrounds – and in surrounding, it gently settles.



Fiber Optic Sensory Rooms at the 5D Immersion Lab – Touch, Light & Gentle Regulation

Fiber optic strands carry light without generating heat, making them uniquely safe and inviting to touch. The quality of illumination they produce – soft, diffused, and continuously shifting – resembles dappled sunlight through forest leaves more closely than any other artificial light source. Simply being in the presence of fiber optic light, or gently running fingers through a curtain of glowing strands, has a naturally grounding, calming effect. Research on multi-sensory light environments consistently shows:

- Reduced restlessness and increased calm during and after sessions
- Improved focus and attentiveness in children and adults
- Decreased anxiety and emotional overwhelm
- Greater ease and connection for families spending time together in the space

Color programs are calibrated to specific needs: violet and blue for calm and focus; warm amber and gold for social comfort and emotional warmth; soft green for grounding and a sense of physical ease. Visitors are encouraged to touch, arrange, and interact – because in this space, engagement and relaxation are the same thing.

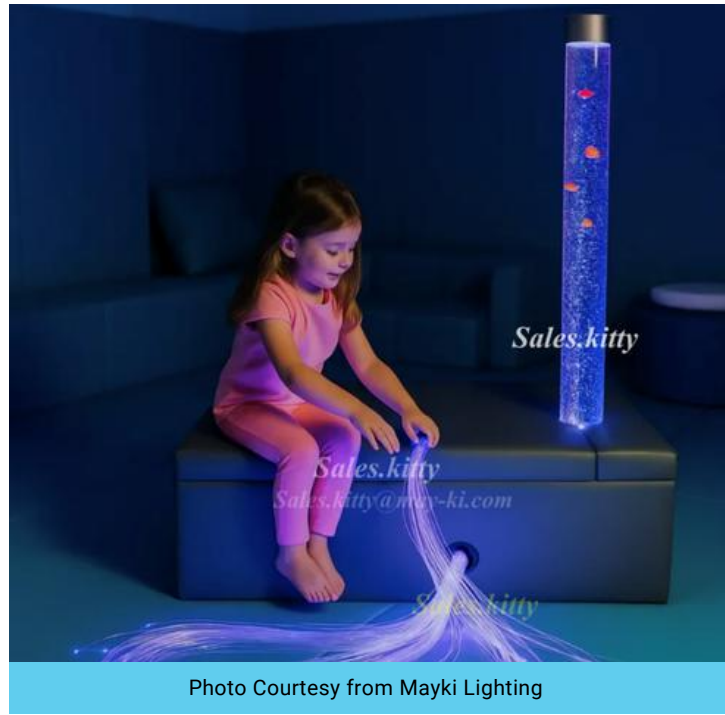


Photo Courtesy from Mayki Lighting

Infrared Sauna Rooms at Center for Wellness Technology – Light That Heals from the Inside

Not all healing light is visible. Near-infrared light – delivered at wavelengths between 800 and 1,000 nanometers – penetrates 2–7 centimeters below the skin's surface, reaching muscle tissue, joints, and the lymphatic system without the harsh surface heat of a conventional sauna. Where a traditional sauna heats the air around you, infrared heat works from within warming the body directly and deeply while the surrounding environment remains comfortably breathable.

Photobiomodulation Therapy

Photobiomodulation (PBM) Therapy uses near infrared (NIR) light to reduce pain, inflammation and edema, and drastically aid recovery. PBM therapy works at the cellular level, stimulating repair and normalizing cell function.



The benefits of regular infrared warmth sessions are gentle and cumulative. Circulation improves, tension held in muscles and joints gradually releases, and the kind of deep fatigue that accumulates from stress and a busy life begins to soften. Sleep becomes more restful. Mood lifts. The body finds its way back to a more comfortable, more settled version of itself.

The Center for Wellness Technology's infrared sauna suites are designed as a seamless extension of the 5D Immersion Lab's therapeutic environment. Visitors move from the light exhibition to the sauna suite carrying the calm their nervous system has already begun to build, and the infrared heat deepens that work at the cellular level. From wonder, to warmth, to restoration – each space preparing the body for what the next one offers, and what the whole person has always needed.

A Wellness Journey to Completeness Through Light at Both Facilities

What distinguishes the 5D Immersion Lab and Center for Wellness Technology from a conventional wellness center is the intentional sequencing of light modalities as a continuous therapeutic journey rather than a menu of isolated services. Visitors move through environments designed to work together:

- Arrival & Transition – a fiber optic entry corridor that begins the nervous system shift from street-level stimulation to therapeutic calm before the main experience begins.
- Immersive Exhibition – the large-format light environment where awe, wonder, and parasympathetic activation create the neurological foundation for everything that follows.
- Fiber Optic Sensory Suite – intimate, hands-on, co-regulatory spaces for individuals, children, and families to consolidate the calm achieved in the main hall.
- Infrared Sauna Suite – deep physiological restoration with sauna paired with infrared light that maintain the immersive aesthetic into the body's deepest healing work.
- Integration Space – a softly lit, acoustically calm space for journaling, conversation, and mindful transition back to everyday environments.

Together, these five environments – sight, sound, touch, heat, and stillness – address the full spectrum of what the human body and mind require to genuinely rest, repair, and reconnect. Both spaces are designed to serve, many of whom carry the cumulative physiological burden of chronic stress, environmental exposure, and systemic health inequity, this is not a luxury offering. It is essential infrastructure.

Light heals. Not metaphorically – measurably, physiologically, neurologically. Both 5D Immersion Lab and Center for Wellness Technology are built on that evidence, and on the conviction that every person, regardless of age, diagnosis, income, or zip code, deserves to stand inside something that makes them feel, for a moment, like the world is vast and beautiful and entirely on their side.



Photo Courtesy: Northern Lighting



THE FUTURE OF WELL-BEING: WHY NEURO WELLNESS IS THE NEXT BIG SHIFT

Columnist - Vivek Ekarat

The wellness world has a new obsession and it's not cold plunges or step counts. It's the 300-million-year-old system that controls how you feel everything.

Picture this: you're lying in bed at 11pm, exhausted but wide awake, your mind cycling through tomorrow's to-do list while your phone glows from across the room. You're not anxious about anything specific. You're just... switched on. And you cannot switch off.

If that sounds familiar, you're not alone and you're not imagining it. Scientists have a name for what's happening inside you: chronic nervous system dysregulation. And in 2026, an entire movement in wellness has formed around fixing it.

Welcome to neuro wellness the fastest-growing shift in a \$7 trillion industry.

We've been optimizing the wrong thing

For the better part of two decades, wellness culture told us to push harder. Track more. Optimize everything. Sleep rings, calorie counters, VO2 max scores the body as a performance project to be managed on a dashboard.

There's a problem with that approach. It adds to the very load it promises to reduce.

“The emerging ethos isn’t about optimizing the body anymore. It’s about regulating it.”

The new generation of neuro wellness doesn’t ask you to perform. It asks your nervous system to finally, genuinely rest.



Why your nervous system is stuck in alarm mode

Your autonomic nervous system evolved to handle a very specific problem: predators. A lion appears, your sympathetic nervous system floods you with adrenaline and cortisol, you run or fight, the lion leaves, and your parasympathetic system brings you back to calm. The toggle was elegant, efficient, and built for a world of occasional threats.

The modern world has broken that toggle.

Notifications. Algorithmic news feeds engineered to provoke outrage. A global pandemic. Climate anxiety. The existential uncertainty of AI. Your nervous system can’t tell the difference between a charging lion and a disturbing headline and unlike the lion, the headlines never stop.

~40%

**of people globally
report high anxiety on
any given day**

>25%

**report sadness
regularly, across
140+ countries
surveyed**

\$7T

**global wellness
economy, now
being reshaped by
brain health**

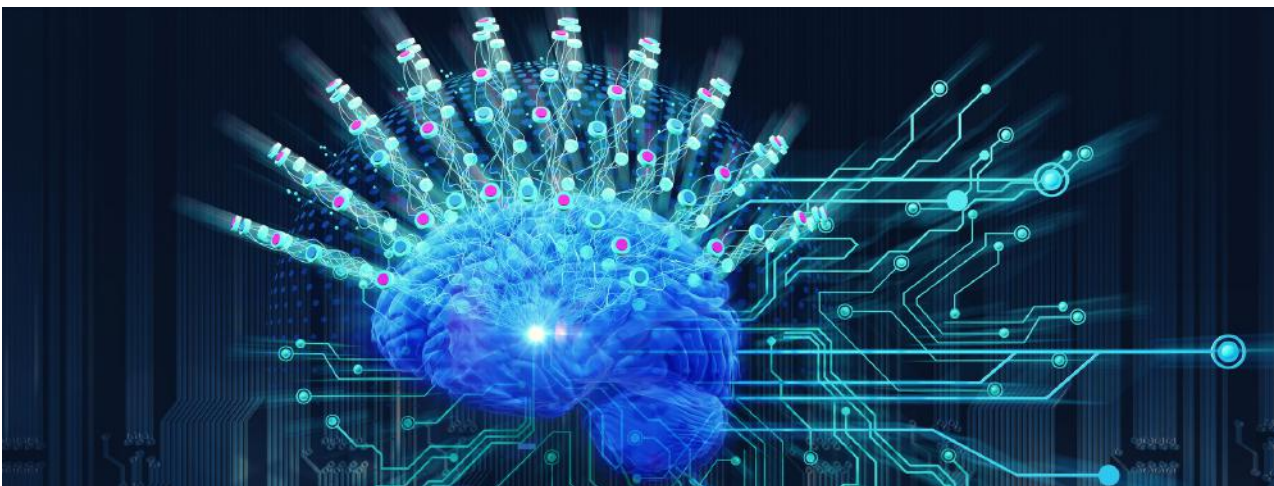
A chronically activated sympathetic nervous system doesn't just make you anxious. It disrupts sleep, impairs digestion, causes hormonal imbalance, accelerates aging, weakens immunity, and degrades cognitive function. Stress isn't just a bad feeling. It's a root cause beneath a forest of modern health problems.

The vagus nerve: your body's built-in reset button

At the center of the neuro wellness movement is a single anatomical structure most people have never heard of: the vagus nerve.

Running from your brainstem all the way into your heart, lungs, and gut, the vagus nerve is the primary channel through which your parasympathetic nervous system tells your body to stand down. When vagal tone the efficiency of this signal is high, you recover from stress quickly, you sleep well, and your body regulates itself beautifully. When it's low, you feel chronically wired, exhausted, and on edge.

The good news? Vagal tone is trainable. And the interventions range from cutting-edge neurotechnology all the way down to things you can do right now, for free.



The new toolkit: from headbands to humming

Wearable neurotechnology

A new generation of EEG-based headbands can read your brainwaves in real time and deliver precisely timed acoustic pulses essentially noise cancellation for your nervous system. Clinical trials show that users wearing these devices fall asleep in roughly half the time they normally would, with some seeing a 74% reduction in the time it takes to drift off. No medication. No side effects. Just sound, timed to the electrical rhythm of your own brain.

Vagus nerve stimulation, once only available through surgically implanted clinical devices, has now crossed into consumer territory. Ear-clip stimulators, neck-worn devices, and chest-placed vibration tools have received regulatory approval in several

markets for treating anxiety and depression a significant crossover from the wellness aisle into mainstream medicine.

Cold exposure

Yes, the cold plunge trend has real science behind it though perhaps not for the reasons most influencers claim. When cold contacts your face and neck, your body triggers what's called the mammalian dive response: heart rate drops, peripheral blood vessels constrict, and the parasympathetic nervous system activates. The shift from stressed to calm can happen in as little as 45 to 75 seconds.

You don't need a \$3,000 ice bath to access this. Cold water on your face before a stressful meeting produces a measurable physiological response. The body doesn't need the performance just the signal.

The arts (yes, really)

One of the most surprising findings in neuro wellness research comes from an unexpected corner: the arts. The field of neuroaesthetics the study of how creative and aesthetic experiences measurably change the brain has built a compelling body of peer-reviewed evidence over the past two decades.

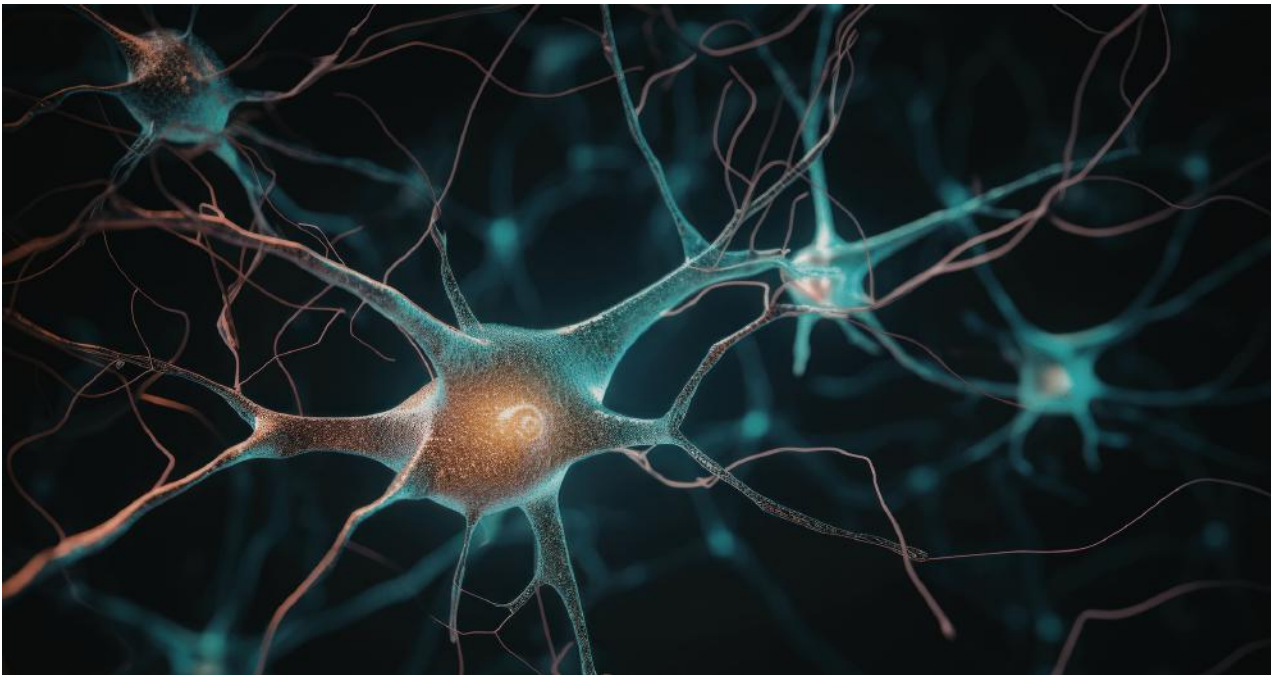
What the research shows: singing interventions for Alzheimer's patients return \$3 for every \$1 spent. Dance programs reduce Parkinson's symptoms. Repetitive hand activities knitting, embroidery, journaling measurably lower cortisol. Mothers who sing with their babies show significantly lower rates of postpartum depression, often avoiding medication entirely. One analysis found that if just 30% of Americans engaged in one arts-based health intervention per month, the annual healthcare savings would reach \$30 billion.

Arts experiences are also uniquely powerful because they act on multiple physiological systems simultaneously respiration, circulation, the muscular system, and the vagus nerve, all at once. No single pharmaceutical intervention can say the same.

The analog counterrevolution

Across the world, something interesting is happening at the grassroots level: mahjong clubs, knitting circles, intellectual salons, sewing groups, and pottery classes are booming. None of them market themselves as wellness. But their appeal is driven by the same underlying need sensory grounding, repetitive hand movement, and genuine human connection in a world that has become increasingly disembodied.





The spaces around you matter more than you think

Here's something most wellness conversations miss entirely: the environments you inhabit are not neutral. Your office, your home, your commute they are actively shaping your nervous system, for better or worse.

A growing discipline called intentional space design is applying neuroscience to architecture. Curved forms feel safer to the eye than sharp angles. Natural materials and greenery activate parasympathetic responses. Lighting calibrated to your circadian rhythm improves sleep architecture. The spaces we design are either supporting regulation or undermining it and most were built with neither in mind.

One data point makes this urgent: the average person's cognitive endurance their capacity to sustain focused mental effort used to last around 90 minutes. Recent research suggests it has collapsed to somewhere between 5 and 20 minutes. The implication for office design, school architecture, and home spaces is profound.

The most democratic wellness movement in history

Neuro wellness carries a familiar risk: becoming another luxury tier available only to those who can afford it. A wearable EEG headband is not cheap. A destination brain-health resort costs thousands.

But here's what's different about this particular wave: the most effective interventions are free.

A slow, extended exhale activates the parasympathetic nervous system. Humming

vibrates the vagus nerve from the inside. Cold water on your forehead triggers a measurable drop in heart rate. Singing, walking in nature, keeping a journal, knitting a row all of these are evidence-based, immediate, and available to everyone.

The challenge isn't access. It's awareness. Most people simply don't know that these everyday acts are pharmaceutical-grade interventions for the nervous system. That's the gap this movement is working to close.



What this means for you, right now

You don't need to buy a new gadget to start. The most powerful entry point into neuro wellness is understanding what your nervous system actually needs and that it is, in fact, something you can influence.

Try a longer exhale tonight. Hum something while you make coffee. Put cold water on your face before your next difficult conversation. Join a group that makes things with their hands. Notice what happens.

The nervous system that learned to fear every ping can also learn to regulate past it. The science is clear, the tools exist, and the most important ones have been free all along.

“The biggest obstacle to human health isn't willpower. It's nervous system overload in a world that never stops transmitting.”

April 9~10

COMMUNITY OF WELLNESS SYMPOSIUM & GALA

The Lotus Health Foundation hosted the Community of Wellness Symposium & Gala at the Mayo Civic Center in Rochester, Minnesota. The event brought together community members, healthcare professionals, and wellness advocates to share knowledge and promote healthy lifestyles through discussions on lifestyle medicine, prevention, and overall well-being, supporting community health and wellness.



April 11

LAO NEW YEAR CELEBRATIONS

Wat Lao Xayabhoummaram – East Bethel of Minnesota hosted a Lao New Year (Pi Mai) celebration at Bouasavanh Hall in Brooklyn Park, Minnesota. The event brought community members together to celebrate cultural traditions through music, performances, and community gatherings, providing an opportunity for families and community members to connect and celebrate Lao heritage. Photo Courtesy: Latsamy Mimi Chandara



April 19

CAMBODIAN NEW YEAR (CHAUL CHNAM THMEY) CELEBRATION

Watt Munisotaram Cambodian Temple hosted a Cambodian New Year (Chaul Chnam Thmey) celebration in Hampton/Farmington, Minnesota. The event brought community members together to celebrate cultural traditions through music, performances, food, and community activities, providing an opportunity for families and community members to connect and observe traditional customs.

Photo Courtesy: Watt Munisotaram



April 19

2026 LAO NEW YEAR SHOW: RIVERS OF LIGHT

The University of Minnesota Lao Student Association hosted the 2026 Lao New Year Show, "Rivers of Light," at Coffman Memorial Union in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The event brought community members together to celebrate Lao heritage through cultural performances, guest speakers, and traditional foods, highlighting themes of renewal, reflection, and community connection.





Startup COMPETITION. SEED *Funding*. MENTORSHIP

2026 MN CUP: CALLING ALL ENTREPRENEURS!

The Secretary of State's office wanted to let you know about a great opportunity for Minnesota entrepreneurs, researchers, inventors, and small business owners. It's called MN Cup, it's organized by the University of Minnesota, and it's available to any Minnesota-based company with less than \$1 million in annual revenue.

[MN Cup](#) has become a great first step for launching a new business, offering free education, mentorship, promotional opportunities, and seed funding for those that advance. The competition is free to enter, and participants have until Friday, April 3, 2026, to submit their application.

[Click here to start your application](#)

[Click here to learn more about MN Cup and their resources](#)

Upcoming Events



Monday, March 2nd



Monday, May 18th



Wednesday, June 3rd

2026 MN Cup Applications Open Now

Apply By April 3rd →

\$10K grants are now open!

It's easier than ever to apply for **\$10K grants**

Digital Ready grants are back. **Apply for \$10,000 grants, part of over \$1M in total funding this year.** You only have to apply once to be considered all year for a \$10K grant, giving you more time to submit an application and take advantage of our courses and events.

VERIZON SMALL BUSINESS DIGITAL READY \$10,000 NATIONAL GRANT

Digital Ready grants are back. Apply for \$10,000 grants, part of over \$1M in total funding this year. You only have to apply once to be considered all year for a \$10K grant, giving you more time to submit an application and take advantage of our courses and events.

Who can apply?

Owners of for-profit small businesses based in the United States, Puerto Rico, or the U.S. Virgin Islands who are 18 or older may apply. Owners of multiple businesses may apply for one business only. See national grant FAQs for more information.

How do I apply?

Register and complete any combination of two eligible courses or events anytime in 2026 to unlock the grant application. Apply once to remain eligible for \$10,000 grants awarded throughout the year.

When will I hear back?

Applications will be reviewed monthly from June through December 2026. Each month, 10 small businesses will be selected for grants. If you are not selected in a given month, your application will remain under consideration for the remainder of 2026. All applicants will receive a final decision by January 12, 2027.

[Apply Today >>](#)



PLAN AHEAD AND SAVE THE DATE

The Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) Office of Broadband Development is hosting the Connecting One: Minnesota 2026 Broadband Summit on Wednesday, April 29, 2026. This in-person event will bring together national leaders, internet service providers, federal, state, tribal, and local government partners, and broadband advocates from across Minnesota. Connecting people to resources, information, and each other is critical to Minnesota's economic stability and digital opportunity.

The summit will start at 8:30 a.m. with registration, coffee, and a light breakfast, and conclude at 4:00 p.m. There will be an opening and welcome from DEED and State leadership, a networking lunch, and breakout sessions on BEAD implementation, mapping, digital skills and security, permitting, and other key topics.

High-level Agenda (Central Time):

- 8:30 a.m.: Arrival and registration with coffee and light breakfast
- 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.: Main stage general sessions with opening welcome from DEED and State leadership
- 12:00 – 1:00 p.m.: Networking lunch and Governor's Broadband Task Force monthly meeting
- 1:00 – 4:00 p.m.: Breakout sessions on key topics and initiatives

Registration will open in early spring. A \$20 registration fee helps cover catering costs and ensures funds are used appropriately.

Full event details, registration, and the agenda will be shared soon. Mark your calendars for April 29!

[For more information >>](#)



We can help you find your focus

Building a budget that actually works. Growing your network organically. Mastering work/life balance. All this and more with Digital Ready. What will your focus be?

Check it out



BUDGETING TIPS AND NETWORKING KNOW-HOW

Struggling with budgeting, networking, or work-life balance? Digital Ready can help you find your focus and achieve your goals. Discover expert insights and practical tools to streamline your success at:

https://link.digitalready.verizonwireless.com/OTk2LUtXQy0zNzcAAAGZKn5A0-kz96GrTzwrOAAOnZ_2TNNWrU_BQXIGWbjvQHw_pjs1hSTgctExNiFQleIF4R3PHE=

Find the event that fits your goals:

<https://digitalready.verizonwireless.com/category/events>



Event · Ask the Expert

Choosing an email marketing platform

Apr 27, 2 PM CT



Event · Hands-on Help

Demystifying marketing plans

Apr 28, 11 AM CT



Event · Ask the Expert

Creating automations for service based businesses

May 12, 1:30 PM CT

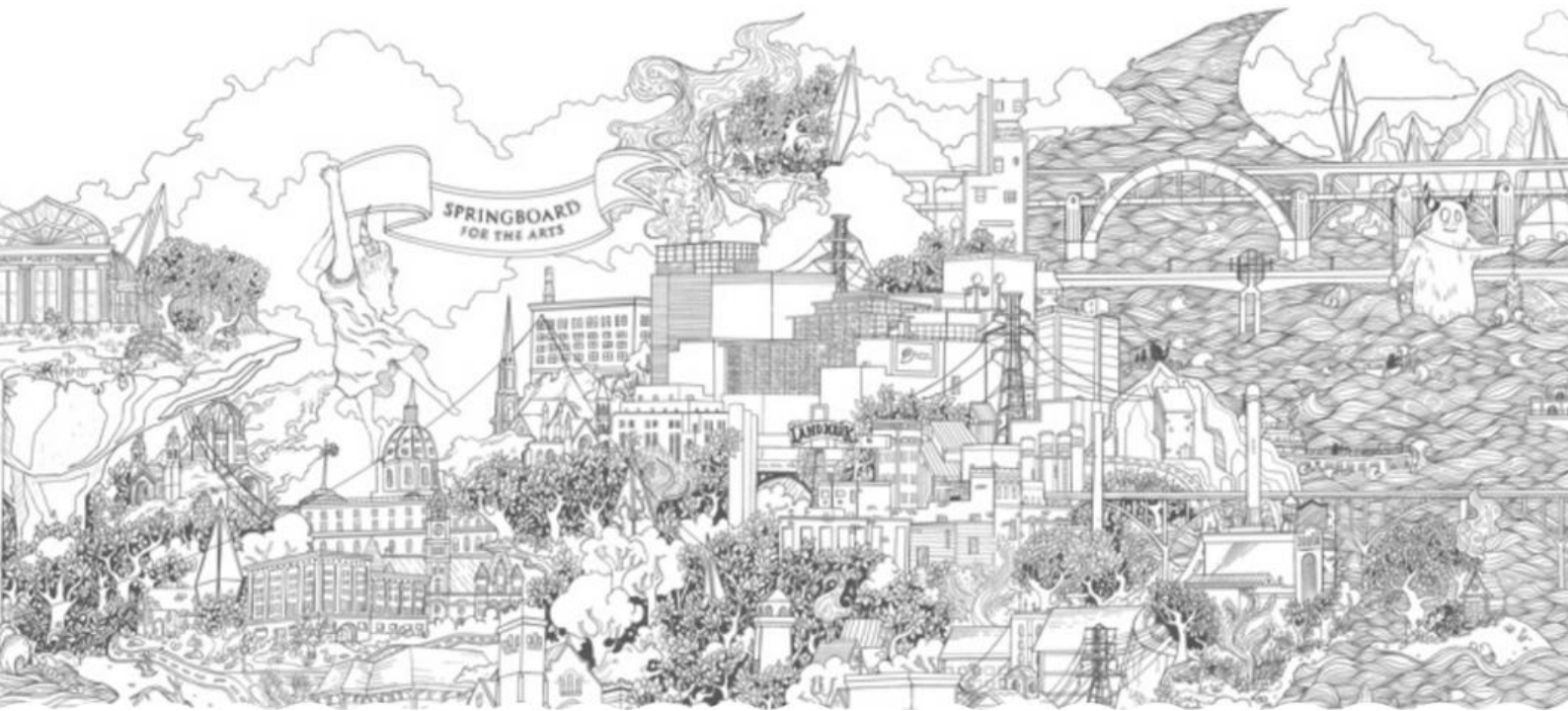


Event · Ask the Expert

Capitalizing on Success: A small business guide to grants

May 13, 1 PM CT





Springboard for the Arts Calendar of Events - Professional Development

- April 30, 2026 5:00 PM – 7:30 PM - Work of Art: Career Planning
- May 05, 2026 6:00 PM – 8:30 PM - Work of Art: Artist Statements
- May 13, 2026 5:00 PM – 7:30 PM - Work of Art: Portfolio Kit
- May 19, 2026 6:00 PM – 8:30 PM - Website Basics for Artists

Learn more and register at: <https://springboardforthearts.org/events/>

Additional Resources

- Get connected to Artist Career Consultants here:
<https://springboardforthearts.org/professional-growth/career-consultations/artist-career-consultants/>
- Work of Art Toolkit: <https://springboardforthearts.org/woa>
- Handbook for Artists Working in Community:
<https://springboardforthearts.org/artists-working-in-community/>

Tax Tips from the IRS



- [Here's what taxpayers need to know about business related travel deductions](#)
- [Companies who promise to eliminate tax debt sometimes leave taxpayers high and dry.](#)
- [Get an Identity Protection PIN.](#)
- [Tax Resources for Members of the Military.](#)



APR
22
1pm~2pm

THE PARTNERSHIP ADVANTGE: CO-BRANDING FOR GROWTH

Business Webinar

[LEARN MORE >>](#)

APR
27
12pm~1pm

Foodpreneur Fundamentals

Business Webinar

[LEARN MORE >>](#)

APR
29
12pm~3pm

QuickBooks Bootcamp

Business Webinar

[LEARN MORE >>](#)

APR
30
2pm~3pm

ADVANCED BEHAVIORAL TECHNIQUES FOR SALES, INFLUENCE, AND HIGH- STAKES NEGOTIATION

Business Webinar

[LEARN MORE >>](#)



MAY

5

9am~10am

Federal Certifications, do you need one? How do you acquire one?

Business Webinar

[LEARN MORE >>](#)

MAY

5

1pm~2pm

NEVER SETTLE: PERSUASION AND NEGOTIATION SKILLS TO GET WHAT YOU WANT

Business Webinar

[LEARN MORE >>](#)

MAY

7

12pm~1pm

CHANGE PERCEPTION, COMMAND THE ROOM, AND CLOSE WITH EASE

Business Webinar

[LEARN MORE >>](#)

MAY

11

6pm~7:15pm

AI for Entrepreneurs

Business Webinar

[LEARN MORE >>](#)

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