



Small Business
Development Center
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

Success Starts Here: Inspiring Growth, Driving Change



Presented by:

University of Georgia Small Business Development Center in Savannah

Tuesday, May 5, 2026 | 8:15 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

Savannah Convention Center

1 International Drive, Savannah, Ga 31421



AGENDA

Scan for
Registration



8:15- 9:00 A.M.

Registration & Red Carpet

Enjoy a Gourmet Coffee Bar & Networking

9:00 - 9:15 A.M.

Rita Goodroe, Summit Emcee - Welcome

9:15 - 10:15 A.M.

Jean Briese, Opening Keynote Speaker

Dream Big: 5 Superpowers Every Trailblazer Needs.

In this inspiring, high-energy keynote, Jean Briese reveals the 5 Superpowers that help leaders and entrepreneurs turn challenges into opportunities for growth. Participants will learn how to expand their impact, lead with clarity, elevate performance, strengthen mindset, and level up satisfaction. You will leave recharged, empowered, and ready to lead with purpose and confidence

10:25 - 11:10 A.M.

Breakout Session 1 - HR | Finance | Marketing

See session descriptions below

11:10 - 11:35 A.M.

Exhibit Hall Mix & Mingle

11:35 - 12:15 P.M.

Lunch, sit, relax, and make new friends!

12:15 - 12:40 P.M.

Exhibit Hall Raffle

12:40 - 1:20 P.M.

From Pop-Up to Prime Time

Big Bon Dream Team: Mama Kay & Shahin

Hosted by 2025 Boss Lady, Emily McCarthy

Founder Kay Heritage shares how Big Bon Bodega grew from a pop-up food truck into a beloved Savannah staple rooted in culture, community, and purpose. Drawing from a journey that began during her childhood in South Korea, Mama Kay reflects on building a values-driven brand featured on Food Network and Good Morning America. She will be joined by her partner, Michelin Star Chef, Shahin Afsharian - whose culinary journey has taken him from Mexico City to the fierce competition on Food Network's Chopped. Together they share how culture, partnership, and a common vision have fueled Big Bon's Growth.

1:30 - 2:15 P.M.

Breakout Session 2 - HR | Finance | Marketing

See session descriptions below



AGENDA CONT'D...

2:25 - 3:20 P.M. Nina Sossamon-Pogue, Closing Keynote Speaker

You're not Done Yet: From Inspired to In Action

Nina's closing keynote brings the room back to life with a high-energy, science-meets-stoicism roadmap that transforms inspiration into implementation. Running a business means constant change—and constant pressure. In this energizing session, Nina Sossamon-Pogue helps entrepreneurs turn disruption into strength. Through her proven THIS Method, you'll learn how to reframe stress, stay grounded under pressure, and adapt forward with clarity and confidence.

3:20 - 3:30 P.M. Rita Goodroe, Summit Emcee -Closing Remarks

4:30 - 6:30 P.M. Savannah Chamber Small Business Week Kickoff Party

Join us and the Savannah Area Chamber of Commerce at Eastern Warf for the Small Business Week Kickoff Celebration

Breakout Session Descriptions

HR Session: The Business of People

How people decisions impact performance, growth, and risk

Suzanne Kirk | Theater Plus 1

Are people part of your strategic plan? Is your culture evident in your employees' experiences? Many business challenges don't start with finances or operational strategy, they start with people. From poorly defined hiring practices, to unclear expectations, to performance issues that go unaddressed, people problems quietly drain time, morale, and money. This session reframes HR as a strategic leadership and business focus, helping attendees understand how the lifecycle of performance management decisions impacts culture, growth, retention, and risk. Walk away with a clearer, more confident approach to managing people without turning your business into a rulebook.

Marketing Session: Be the Answer AI Recommends

How to Stand Out in a World of Generative Search

Nadia Osman | Theater Plus 2

Search is changing and the rules for being found are changing with it. Instead of returning long lists of links, AI tools like ChatGPT, Claude, Copilot and Google's AI Overviews generate direct answers and recommendations. That means your business needs more than keywords to show up, you need to be recognizable, relevant and easy for AI to explain. In this session, you will learn how smart search engines interpret your online presence and walk away with practical steps to improve your visibility, positioning and discoverability in a world where AI is answering first.



Finance Session: Inside the Lender's Decision

How Business Loans Really Get Approved

The Ladies Who Lend | Theater Plus 3

Securing capital isn't about luck—it's about preparation. This session demystifies how lenders evaluate loan requests, beginning with the foundational 5 C's of Credit and how they are applied in real lending decisions. Local and regional lenders will discuss a range of financing options, including traditional bank loans, SBA programs, and lesser-known alternative funding solutions. Attendees will leave with a clearer understanding of what lenders look for, how to position their business for approval, and which funding paths may be a better fit than they previously realized.

Gold Sponsors:



Silver Sponsors:





Small Business
Development Center
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

2026 BUSINESS SUMMIT SAVANNAH

Tuesday, May 5th, 2026
1 International Drive
Savannah, GA 31421

Bronze Sponsors :



Media Sponsors:



The UGA Small Business Development Center is a Public Service and Outreach unit of the University of Georgia, funded through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Small Business Administration. All programs of the UGA SBDC are open to the public on a non-discriminatory basis. Reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities will be made if requested at least two weeks in advance. **Contact The Savannah Office at savannah@georgiasbdc.org | (912) 651-3200**