

October 5, 2011

Don Fox Acting Director and General Counsel Office of Government Ethics 1201 New York Avenue, NW Suite 500 Washington, DC 20005-3917

RE: RIN 3209-AA04

[Proposed Amendments Limiting Gifts from Registered Lobbyists and Lobbying Organizations]

Dear Mr. Fox:

ASAE is appreciative of the opportunity to comment on proposed rule RIN 3209-AA04, which restricts all executive branch employees of the Federal Government from using certain exceptions to accept gifts from registered federal lobbyists and lobbying organizations, including invitations to widely attended gatherings ("WAGs").

The American Society of Association Executives ("ASAE") is a section 501(c)(6) individual membership organization of more than 22,000 association executives and industry partners representing nearly 12,000 tax-exempt organizations. Its members manage leading trade associations, professional societies, and voluntary organizations across the United States and in 50 countries around the globe. We advocate for associations so that they may continue to fulfill their important missions and improve the quality of life in the United States and abroad.

ASAE fully supports OGE's mission to promote high ethical standards for executive branch employees, and is generally accepting of OGE's intention to limit some of the exceptions that may have been used on occasion to permit certain gifts, such as invites to holiday parties or other social events, where the nexus to the government's interest is attenuated.

ASAE is encouraged, further, by OGE's acknowledgement that certain widely attended gatherings can serve important government purposes. OGE justly asserts in its proposed rule that federal employees, including political appointees, should be able to accept offers of free attendance to "substantive events that would provide a legitimate educational or professional development benefit that furthers the interests of an agency."

In crafting that exception, OGE proposes to allow government employees to accept invitations to attend educational and professional development activities held by Section 501(c)(3) organizations, institutions

of higher education, and nonprofit professional associations, scientific organizations and learned societies, without regard to the LDA registration status of these entities. In explaining the WAG exception, OGE correctly points to the valuable educational and professional development opportunities at these types of programs, but then inexplicably leaves trade associations out of the limited exclusion.

OGE contends in its proposed rule that trade associations "may sponsor educational activities for their members and even the public, but the primary concern of such associations generally is not the education and development of members of a profession or discipline, which is the focus of the proposed exclusion."

This narrow reading of trade association activities based on a definition from Encyclopedia Britannica ignores the important role these organizations play in virtually every industry that the government seeks to regulate. Companies join trade associations to promote common interests, share best practices and learn about the latest developments in their industry. While many trade associations engage in advocacy, they also help resolve industry-wide issues that could otherwise threaten economic growth, and set safety and technical standards that benefit everyone in exactly the same way as professional associations, scientific organizations and learned societies.

A considerable intersection exists between government and trade associations' interests. Today's mixed economy – where government and business both play important roles with regard to production, consumption, job creation, and investment – requires mutual understanding and a free exchange of ideas, knowledge and expertise to ensure informed policymaking and economic progress.

Lawrence Summers, former director of the White House National Economic Council, said last year, "Business and government have important mutual obligations. Government must recognize the importance of building the foundations for businesses to succeed and ensuring a stable business environment. Likewise, businesses must carefully consider their obligations to their fellow citizens."

In an address earlier this year to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, President Obama said he envisioned a partnership between the public and private sectors that he called "Winning the Future," promising to lay the foundation for businesses to grow and innovate and asking businesses to invest in America.

Setting policies that restrict knowledge-sharing between the government and trade associations is counterproductive to the administration's stated aspirations to work in partnership with the business community to create jobs and grow the economy.

Trade associations are among the many types of nonprofit organizations that sponsor programs in consonance with government interests and with Federal employees' professional development aspirations. They regularly hold seminars, conferences, trade shows and other programs that forecast industry performance and spotlight concerns. Government employees tasked with promulgating regulations most assuredly benefit from attending programs where they can learn about latest developments, see new product demonstrations, and understand how industries might be impacted by rulemaking. At the same time, trade association members have the opportunity to learn more about agencies' interests and processes and are better prepared to comply with federal regulations.

These educational and professional development programs conducted by trade associations are virtually indistinguishable from those conducted by the other types of organizations listed in the proposed rule. They offer the same benefits to government employees and should qualify for the same exclusion.

While ASAE appreciates OGE's stipulation that government employees can accept free attendance at events where they are speaking or presenting information on behalf of the administration, the unbalanced treatment of trade association programs in the proposed rulemaking will likely discourage federal employees from availing themselves of these opportunities. Further, the implication in the proposed rule that trade associations use invitations to events as a means of cultivating access by registered lobbyists makes it unlikely federal employees would pay out-of-pocket to attend these types of programs and events, even if they would benefit from attending.

Another unintended consequence of this proposed rulemaking could be that it causes trade associations to deregister as lobbyists so as not to fall under the restriction on gifts such as widely attended gatherings. This would undermine the administration's stated interest in transparency, which we share.

There are countless examples of legitimate, substantive trade association programming that intersect with the government's interests. Trade associations exist for every industry that the federal government regulates, from food safety and insurance to energy and telecommunications, just to name a few. These organizations and the industries they represent want to work with the administration to grow the economy, reduce unemployment, and protect America's standing and credibility in the world. In order to work together, we need the administration to recognize associations as something more than lobbying groups working to exert undue influence over federal agencies and their employees.

ASAE and the attached list of associations urge OGE to revise its proposed exception for gifts to allow federal employees to attend substantive educational programs and events held by trade associations, for the same reasons that this exception has been extended to the other types of organizations listed in the proposed rule.

Thank you in advance for your consideration and if you have any questions, please contact Jim Clarke, senior vice president of public policy at ASAE, at 202-626-2865 or <a href="mailto:jclarke@asaenet.org">jclarke@asaenet.org</a>.

Sincerely,

John H. Graham IV, CAE President and CEO

#### **Association Names Listed by State**

J. N. Hrelm IV

## <u>Alabama</u>

Alabama Association of Realtors Montgomery

American Society for Reproductive Medicine Birmingham

#### Arizona

American Association of Cosmetology Schools Scottsdale

The Software Defined Radio Forum, Inc. Phoenix

## **Arkansas**

Arkansas Timber Producers Association Little Rock

# **California**

Association for Play Therapy Clovis

Association Management Services, Inc. Pasadena

Bobrow and Associates Citrus Heights

CAHSAH: The California Association for Health Services at Home Sacramento

California, Nevada, Arizona Automotive Wholesalers Association Rancho Cordova

CASS – An International Separation Science Society
Emeryville

Electronics Representatives Association, Southern California Chapter Irvine

Hollywood Post Alliance Los Angeles

Independent Pool and Spa Service Association Granada Hills

International Association of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials (IAPMO)
Ontario

Medical Oncology Association of Southern California, Inc.
Upland

Motorcycle Industry Council Irvine

Motorcycle Safety Foundation Irvine

National Public Employer Labor Relations Association Oceanside

Pacific-West Fastener Association Los Alamitos

Recreational Off-Highway Vehicle Association Irvine

San Francisco Travel Association San Francisco

Specialty Equipment Market Association Diamond Bar

Specialty Vehicle Institute of America Irvine

World Pet Association, Inc. Monrovia

### **Connecticut**

National Shooting Sports Foundation Newtown

#### Delaware

Vehicle Protection Association Selbyville

## **District of Columbia**

AAEI: American Association of Exporters and Importers

AdvaMed – Advanced Medical Technology Association

Agriculture Retailers Association

Airports Council International - North America

American Association of State Colleges and Universities

American Astronomical Society

American Bakers Association

American Beverage Association

**American Chemistry Council** 

American Cleaning Institute

American College of Emergency Physicians

American Council of Engineering Companies

American Council of Independent Laboratories

American Council on International Personnel

American Health Care Association

The American Hotel & Lodging Association

American Immigration Lawyers Association

American Nursery & Landscaping Association

American Public Power Association

American Public Transportation Association

American Road & Transportation Builders

Association

America's Blood Centers

Animal Health Institute

**Association of Cable Communicators** 

Association of Community College Trustees

Association of Corporate Counsel

Association of Defense Communities

Association of Global Automakers

Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers

**Biotechnology Industry Organization** 

**Building Owners and Managers Association** 

(BOMA) International

Coalition for Health Funding

Coalition for Health Services Research

**COMPTEL:** The Competitive Communications

Association

Consumer Healthcare Products Association

**Consumer Specialty Products Association** 

Council for Advancement & Support of

Education (CASE)

**Council for Responsible Nutrition** 

**Credit Union National Association** 

CropLife America

**Direct Marketing Association** 

Edison Electric Institute

The ESOP Association

The Fertilizer Institute

General Aviation Manufacturers Association

(GAMA)

**Hearing Industries Association** 

Independent Community Bankers of America

Industrial Minerals Association – North America

Institute of Makers of Explosives

Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries, Inc. (ISRI)

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International Biometrics & Identification Association	National Customs Brokers and Forwarders Association of America, Inc.
Metal Construction Association	National Leased Housing Association
Medical Device Manufacturers Association	Nuclear Energy Institute
Mortgage Bankers Association	Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America
National Agricultural Aviation Association	
National Association for Surface Finishing	Railway Engineering-Maintenance Suppliers Association
National Association of Affordable Housing Lenders	RISE (Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment)
National Association of Broadcasters	Safety Net Hospitals for Pharmaceutical Access
National Association of Clean Water Agencies (NACWA)	Small Business Legislative Council
(NACVA)	Specialized Carriers & Rigging Association
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Development Disability Directors	Society for Neuroscience
National Association of Enrolled Agents	Tate & Tryon, CPAs and Consultants
National Association of Home Builders	TechAmerica
National Association of Manufacturers	United Fresh Produce Association
National Association of Realtors®	United States Telecom Association
National Association of Surety Bond Producers	U.S. Chamber of Commerce
National Association of Water Companies	U.S. Grains Council
National Association of Wheat Growers	U.S. Travel Association
National Cable and Telecommunications Association	Vinyl Siding Institute
National Center for Assisted Living	Washington Area New Automobile Dealers Association
National Cooperative Business Association	Washington Metropolitan Area Corporate Counsel Association (WMACCA)
National Corn Growers Association	· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·

<u>Florida</u>

Florida Assisted Living Association

Tallahassee

Florida Chiropractic Association

Oakland

Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association

Maitland

Florida Police Chiefs Association

Tallahassee

Laser Institute of America, Inc.

Orlando

Manatee Chamber of Commerce

Bradenton

National Council of Youth Sports (NCYS)

Stuart

PGA of America

Palm Beach Gardens, FL

**Georgia** 

American College of Rheumatology

Atlanta

Georgia Association of Water Professionals

Marietta

Georgia Chiropractic Association

Tucker

Georgia Society of Association Executives

Atlanta

The Georgia Society of CPAs

Atlanta

Greater Atlanta Homebuilders Association

Atlanta

National Poultry & Food Distributors

Association St. Marys

Southeastern Affordable Housing Management

Association Atlanta

Southern Association of Independent Schools

Alpharetta

Southern Crop Production Association

Dawson

<u>Illinois</u>

Academy of General Dentistry

Chicago

AMC: Association Management Center

Glenview

American Academy of Periodontology

Foundation Chicago

American Architectural Manufacturers

Association Schaumburg

American Association of Neurological Surgeons

**Rolling Meadows** 

American Dietetic Association

Chicago

**American Fence Association** 

Glen Ellyn

American Health Information Management

Association Chicago

American Osteopathic Association

Chicago

American Supply Association

Chicago

American Veterinary Medical Association

Schaumburg

Institute of Real Estate Management Appraisal Institute Chicago Chicago International Association of Diecutting and **Associated Equipment Distributors** Diemaking Oak Brook Crystal Lake Associated General Contractors of the Quad International Association of Lighting Designers Cities Chicago **Rock Island IPC Association Connecting Electronics** Association Forum of Chicagoland Industries Chicago Bannockburn Association of Rotational Molders Media Financial Management Association Northfield Glen Ellyn **Bearing Specialists Association** Metals Service Center Institute Glen Ellyn **Rolling Meadows CCIM** Institute NAMA: National Automatic Merchandising Chicago Association Chicago Ceramic Tile Distributors Association Glen Ellyn National Association of Architectural Metal Manufacturers Concrete Reinforcing Steel Institute Glen Ellyn Schaumburg National Church Goods Association Cook-Witter, Inc. Glen Ellyn Springfield National Marine Manufacturers Association **Exit Planning Institute** Chicago Algonquin **National Roofing Contractors Association** Illinois Academy of Family Physicians Rosemont Lisle **National Sporting Goods Association** Illinois Retail Merchants Association **Mount Prospect** Chicago Plastic Pipe and Fittings Association Illinois Society of Association Executives Glen Ellyn Springfield

Institute of Food Technologists

Chicago

Plumbing Manufacturers International Rolling Meadows

**Pressure Sensitive Tape Council** 

Naperville, IL

Portland Cement Association Skokie

Precast/Prestressed Concrete Institute Chicago

Pressure Vessel Manufacturers Association Glen Ellyn

The Sherwood Group Deerfield

Southern Illinois Builders Association, a chapter of the Associated General Contractors of America
O'Falllon

Thermoset Resin Formulators Association Glen Ellyn

Third Season Consulting, LLC Deerfield

Turfgrass Producers International East Dundee

## Indiana

American Bus Association Indianapolis

Delta Sigma Phi Fraternity Indianapolis

Indiana Bankers Association Indianapolis

Indiana Funeral Directors Association Indianapolis

Indiana Society of Association Executives Indianapolis

Project Health, The Indianapolis Medical Society Indianapolis

#### <u>lowa</u>

Iowa Telecommunications Association Urbandale

## **Kansas**

American College of Clinical Pharmacy (ACCP) Lenexa

American Council of Engineering Companies of Kansas Topeka

Angel Capital Association Overland Park

Golf Course Superintendents Association of America Lawrence

Kansas Livestock Association Topeka

Kansas Organization of Recyclers Topeka

Kansas Pest Control Association Topeka

Kansas Society of Association Executives Topeka

National Association of Trailer Manufacturers Topeka, KS

#### Louisiana

International Freight Forwarders & Custom Brokers Association of New Orleans Metairie

Louisiana Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers Baton Rouge, LA

Louisiana Dental Association Baton Rouge Louisiana Gas Association Baton Rouge

Louisiana Industry for Film and Entertainment Baton Rouge

Louisiana Society of Association Executives Baton Rouge

National Association of Insurance & Financial Advisors - Louisiana Baton Rouge

## Maine

Maine Association of Broadcasters, Inc. Augusta

## **Maryland**

American Gastroenterological Association Bethesda

American Nurses Association Silver Spring

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA)
Rockville

Automotive Aftermarket Industry Association Bethesda

Forest Resources Association Rockville

Home Ports, Inc. Chestertown

National Association of School Psychologists Bethesda

National Electrical Contractors Association Bethesda

National Asphalt Pavement Association Lanham

National School Supply & Equipment Association Silver Spring

National Ready Mixed Concrete Association Silver Spring

Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association Silver Spring

## Massachusetts

The Association Advantage LLC Wakefield

The Guild Associates, Inc. Malden

Infusion Nurses Society Norwood

## Michigan

Association of Directory Publishers Traverse City

Association Services of Michigan Lansing

The Engineering Society of Detroit Southfield

National Truck Equipment Association Farmington Hills

Post-Tensioning Institute Farmington Hills

### **Minnesota**

American Academy of Neurology St. Paul

American Association of Neuromuscular & Electrodiagnostic Medicine (AANEM) Rochester

The Harrington Company Minneapolis

Joint Commission on Allied Health Personnel in Ophthalmology

St. Paul

## Missouri

AGC of Saint Louis
St. Louis

EPCOR Kansas City

International Association of Assessing Officers Kansas City

National Christmas Tree Association Chesterfield

St. Louis Council of Construction Consumers Manchester

#### **Montana**

Montana Health Care Association Helena

Montana Society of Association Executives Helena

Montana Telecommunications Association Helena

## <u>Nebraska</u>

Nebraska Bankers Association Lincoln

Nebraska REALTORS Association Lincoln

## Nevada

Nevada Society of Association Executives Las Vegas

# **New Hampshire**

New Hampshire Dental Society Concord

## **New Jersey**

APMI International Princeton

Association of Food Industries Neptune

Juvenile Products Manufacturers Association Mount Laurel

Metal Powder Industries Federation Princeton

National Coalition of Estheticians, Manufacturers/Distributors & Associations Ridgewood

New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies, Inc.
Mercerville

New Jersey Hospice and Palliative Care Organization Scotch Plains

New Jersey Landscape Contractors Association Elmwood Park

NJAFED – NJ Association of Fire Equipment Distributors
Plainfield

Professional Association of Innkeepers International Haddon Heights

## New Mexico

IIANM: Independent Insurance Agents of New Mexico Albuquerque

## New York

American Business Media New York City Empire State Society of Association Executives, Inc.

East Greenbush

Illuminating Engineering Society New York

Independent Insurance Agents & Brokers of New York
Syracuse

International Trademark Association (ITA) New York City

MPA – The Association of Magazine Media New York City

National Student Nurses' Association Brooklyn

New York Association of Convenience Stores Albany

New York State Motor Truck Association Albany

NYBFAA – NY Burglar & Fire Alarm Association Albany

### **North Carolina**

Association Executives of North Carolina Raleigh

Carolina/Virginia Dairy Products Association Morrisville

Carolinas AGC Charlotte

The Hosiery Association Charlotte, NC

IMI Association Executives Morrisville

Motor & Equipment Manufacturers Association Research Triangle

National Association of Professional Background Screeners Morrisville

United States Lactation Consultant Association Morrisville

Wilmington Regional Association of REALTORS, Inc.
Wilmington

## Ohio

Experience Columbus Columbus

Marble Institute of America Cleveland

National Association of College Stores Oberlin

National Ground Water Association Westerville

OFA – The Association for Horticulture Professionals Columbus

Ohio Council for Home Care and Hospice Columbus

Ohio Osteopathic Association Columbus

Ohio Podiatric Medical Association Columbus

Ohio Provider Resource Association Columbus

Ohio Society of Association Executives Columbus, OH

Ohio Society of Certified Public Accountants Columbus

Ohio State Medical Association Hilliard

Precision Metalforming Association Independence, OH

## **Oklahoma**

Associated Wire Rope Fabricators Tulsa

Oklahoma Association of Realtors Oklahoma City

United Suburban Schools Association Oklahoma City

## **Oregon**

ComNet Marketing Group Medford

Oregon Society of Association Management (OSAM)
Portland

Professional Land Surveyors of Oregon Salem

# <u>Pennsylvania</u>

AASP-PA Harrisburg

Alliance of Automotive Service Providers of Pennsylvania, Inc. Harrisburg

American Association of Birth Centers Perkiomenville

Industrial Supply Association Philadelphia

Installation Quality Certification Program Erie

Manufacturer and Business Association Erie

PAFED – PA Association of Fire Equipment Distributors
Erie

PBFAA – Pennsylvania Burglar & Fire Alarm Association
Frie

Pennsylvania Bankers Association Harrisburg

Soroptimist International of the Americas Philadelphia

## Rhode Island

Association of Marina Industries Warren

## **South Carolina**

Home Builders Association of South Carolina Columbia

## **Tennessee**

AALAS: American Association for Laboratory Animal Science Memphis

America Outdoors Association Knoxville

American Council of Engineering Companies of Tennessee Nashville

College and University Professional Association for Human Resources Knoxville

Tennessee Medical Association Nashville

Tennessee Road Builders Association Nashville

#### **Texas**

American Lighting Association Dallas

CMP Management, Inc.

Austin

ESA, Electronic Security Association

Irving

Greater Houston Homebuilders Association

Houston

**Houston Apartment Association** 

Houston

IAEE: International Association of Exhibitions

and Events Dallas

International Institute of Synthetic Rubber

Producers, Inc.

Houston

National Independent Automobile Dealers

Association Arlington

**Promotional Products Association International** 

Irving, TX

San Antonio Society of Association Executives

San Antonio

Southwestern Automated Clearing House

Association Dallas

Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers

Association Fort Worth

**Texas Apartment Association** 

Austin

Texas Association for Home Care & Hospice

Austin

Texas Credit Union League

**Dallas** 

**Texas Poultry Federation** 

**Round Rock** 

Texas Society of CPAs

**Dallas** 

<u>Virginia</u>

Aerospace Industries Association of America,

Inc. Arlington

Air Conditioning Contractors of America

Arlington

Air-Conditioning, Heating and Refrigeration

Institute Arlington

Alliance for Women in Media

McLean

American Academy of Audiology

Reston

American Academy of Physician Assistants

Alexandria

American Association for the Study of Liver

Disease Alexandria

American College of Radiology

Reston

American Composites Manufacturers

Association Arlington

American Council of Engineering Companies of

Virginia Richmond

**American Counseling Association** 

Alexandria

American Frozen Food Institute

McLean

Construction Industry Round Table American Industrial Hygiene Association McLean **Fairfax** The Consumer Electronics Association American Institute for International Steel Arlington Falls Church **Convention Industry Council** American Moving & Storage Association Alexandria Alexandria Council for Affordable and Rural Housing American Network of Community Options and Alexandria Resource Alexandria Door and Hardware Institute Chantilly American Seed Trade Association Alexandria EastPay Inc. Richmond American Society of Travel Agents Alexandria Effective Database Management Hamilton **American Staffing Association** Alexandria **Emergency Department Practice Management** Association American Traffic Safety Services Association McLean Fredericksburg Healthcare Distribution Management American Wood Council Association Leesburg Arlington **Associated General Contractors** Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Association Arlington Arlington Association for Metallically Stabilized Earth ICPI, Interlocking Concrete Pavement Institute McLean Herndon **Association Management Group** Independent Office Products and Furniture McLean **Dealers Association** Alexandria **Brick Industry Association** InfoComm International Reston

Fairfax

Pharmacists Alexandria

International Academy of Compounding

CMAA: Construction Management Association

of America McLean

Chantilly, VA

**Compressed Gas Association** 

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International Association of Amusement Parks National Association of Chain Drug Stores and Attractions Alexandria Alexandria National Association of Chemical Distributors International Cooperative and Mutual Insurance (NACD) Federation/ Regional Association for the Arlington Americas McLean National Association of Children's Hospitals Alexandria International Liquid Terminals Association (ILTA) Arlington National Association of Development Companies International Sign Association McLean Alexandria National Association of Professional Insurance International Wood Products Association Agents Alexandria Alexandria Irrigation Association **National Association of Court Reporters** Falls Church Vienna Kitchen Cabinet Manufacturers Association National Association of Insurance and Financial Advisors Reston, VA Falls Church LarsonAllen LLP Arlington National Automobile Dealers Association McLean The M Companies National Council of Agricultural Employers Arlington Vienna Military Officers' Association of America Alexandria National Electrical Manufacturers Association Arlington NACHA - The Electronic Payments Association National Industries for the Blind Herndon Alexandria NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) National Milk Producers Federation Arlington Arlington National Affordable Housing Management Association National Office Products Alliance Alexandria Alexandria National Alliance of State Pharmacy National Rural Electric Cooperative Association Associations Arlington

Richmond

National RV Dealers Association

**Fairfax** 

National Society of Professional Engineers Alexandria

NATSO, Representing America's Travel Plazas and Truckstops Alexandria

Non-Profit Help Alexandria

Office Furniture Dealers Association Alexandria

Pellet Fuels Institute Arlington

Petroleum Marketers Association of America Arlington

Plumbing-Heating-Cooling Contractors – National Association McLean

Professional Landcare Network Herndon

Professional Services Council Arlington

Security Industry Association (SIA) Alexandria

Sheet Metal and Air Conditioning Contractors' National Association (SMACNA) Chantilly

Society of American Florists Alexandria

Society of Government Meeting Professionals Alexandria

Special Libraries Association Alexandria

Student & Youth Travel Association McLean

Tecker International LLC Clifton

Telecommunications Industry Association Arlington

United Motorcoach Association Alexandria

U.S. Clean Heat & Power Association Falls Church

Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police Richmond

Virginia Nurses Association Richmond

Virginia Society of Association Executives Glen Allen

Virginia Society of CPAs Glen Allen, VA

Virginia Trucking Association Richmond

## **Washington**

King County (Seattle) Bar Association Seattle

#### Wisconsin

American Malting Barley Association Milwaukee

National Funeral Directors Association Brookfield

Snow & Ice Management Association, Inc. Milwaukee