



# 2025 Recap

Driving Innovation Forward

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# RGF Overview

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Rice Global Forum (RGF) is a premier industry consortium that connects industry leaders, academia, and emerging professionals to advance thought leadership, meaningful dialogue, networking, and professional development. As a future-looking organization, RGF addresses real-world execution challenges by applying new thinking and emerging technologies through curated programming and strategic partnerships, bringing together owners, contractors, suppliers, and academic leaders across complex, multidisciplinary industries.

## 2025 Highlights

- Appointment of new Chair, Cassidy Welch
- 120% increase in sponsor membership
- Significant growth across RGF and Aspire membership
- Strengthened academic–industry partnerships
- Strong cadence of well-attended, high-impact events
- Diverse and innovative event programming spanning offshore energy, chemical recycling, artificial intelligence in construction, and a gala keynote



# Message from the Board

As we reflect on the past year, it is clear that **2025 marked a turning point for Rice Global Forum.**

RGF entered the year with renewed focus and emerged with **strong momentum**, expanding its sponsorship base, increasing membership engagement, and delivering programming that resonated with both industry and academic communities. This progress reflects committed leadership, an energized Board, and the trust placed in RGF by its partners and participants.

Rather than organizing the year around a single theme, RGF intentionally embraced a **broad range of forward-thinking topics** and unconventional perspectives, reinforcing RGF's role as a forum for bold ideas and meaningful exchange.

From where we stood at the close of 2024 to where we stand today, Rice Global Forum has evolved into **a more dynamic and relevant platform** that continues to connect ideas, industries, and future leaders. We move forward with confidence, momentum, and a shared commitment to shaping the conversations that will define the future of industry.



# Aspire Group

Rice Global Forum Aspire is a community of emerging professionals and future leaders operating under the Rice Global Forum umbrella. Aspire empowers high-potential talent through professional development, industry exposure, and hands-on leadership opportunities, creating a strong bridge between academia and industry.

## What Aspire Delivers

- **Professional Development:** Leadership skills, career advancement, and practical industry insight
- **Industry Exposure:** Direct interaction with senior professionals and subject-matter experts
- **Network & Community:** A collaborative peer network spanning disciplines and industries
- **Active Participation:** Opportunities to lead, organize, and contribute to RGF initiatives, events, and Board committees
- **Dialogue & Communication:** Forums and discussions that strengthen industry awareness and communication skills

**360%**  
increase in Aspire  
membership  
during 2025



# 2025 Panel Discussions and Events



TRASH OR TREASURE:

# Circular Economy Chemical & Plastic Recycling

## Q1 Event

On March 6, Rice Global Forum (RGF) hosted a discussion panel on chemical and plastic recycling, with 120 registered participants representing the energy, chemicals, sustainability, and investment communities.

The session examined whether chemical recycling can realistically enable a circular economy or whether economic, technical, and regulatory constraints limit its impact.

James Starr, Dr. Ganesh Nagarajan, and Dr. Andreas Neumann, moderated by Cassidy Welch, shared practical insights on technology readiness, market adoption, certification frameworks, and feedstock challenges shaping the future of circularity in the chemicals and plastics sector.



From left to right: Ganesh Nagarajan, Senior Director, Plastics at Waste Management; Cassidy Welch, Key Account Manager, Engineering Partnerships Region at BASF North America; Andreas Neumann, Technology Director, Business Development Pyroil & Gasification at Basell Polyolefins GmbH; and James Starr, Senior Manager, Circularity Market at Technip Energies.

TRASH OR TREASURE:

# Circular Economy Chemical & Plastic Recycling

## Q1 Event

### Key Takeaways

- **Chemical recycling is a complementary solution**, particularly for hard-to-recycle plastics, not a replacement for mechanical recycling or waste reduction.
- **Cost and energy intensity remain the biggest barriers** to large-scale adoption and competitiveness with virgin materials.
- **Mass balance certification must be transparent and credible** to build customer trust, justify premiums, and gain regulatory acceptance.
- **Reliable, high-quality feedstock is critical** and depends on improved sorting, preprocessing, and supply-chain partnerships.
- **Scaling requires cross-value-chain collaboration** among technology providers, producers, regulators, and waste managers.



# Powering the Future, One Byte at a Time

## Q2 Event

On May 15, the Rice Global Forum (RGF) convened industry leaders for a timely discussion on the future of digital infrastructure, examining the rapid growth of data centers, evolving power demands, and the critical role of supply chains.

Moderated by Jonathan Rennie of Honeycomb Anthems, the panel brought together perspectives from EPC delivery, clean power deployment, climate technology, and manufacturing to explore how scalability, innovation, and sustainability are reshaping the sector.

The conversation highlighted the importance of resilient supply chains, coordinated development strategies, and forward-looking technology adoption to support the next generation of digital and energy infrastructure.



From left to right: Jonathan Rennie, Executive Consultant at Honeycomb Anthems; Kristin Homs, Manager of Supply Chain at Bechtel Manufacturing & Technology; Paola Carvajal, Sales Director for Clean Power and Climate Technology Solutions at Baker Hughes; Scarlett Harrod, Head of Origination at NET Power; and Arran Davidson, Director of Business Development at Worley.

# Powering the Future, One Byte at a Time

## Q2 Event

### Key Takeaways

- **AI-Driven Megaprojects:** The AI boom has transformed data centers into megaprojects requiring integrated power, water, and digital infrastructure delivery.
- **Investment and Market Growth:** Hyperscalers plan over \$300 billion capital expenditure in 2025 with global data center market growing at 15% CAGR to \$80 billion by 2029.
- **Innovation and Sustainability:** Emerging technologies like SMRs, carbon capture, and AI-enabled systems enable scalable and sustainable data center solutions.
- **Supply Chain and Labor Strategies:** Supply chain volatility and labor constraints drive modularization, offsite manufacturing, and proactive risk planning.



# Ctrl + Alt + Disrupt“, Rethinking EPC project delivery in the age of AI

## Q3 Event

This event brought together industry leaders to discuss how Artificial Intelligence is transforming Engineering, Procurement, and Construction (EPC) project delivery. Hosted and sponsored by FTI Consulting and AVEVA, the forum featured a timely discussion on AI’s expanding role in capital projects.

Moderated by Kyle Wetzold, the panel shared perspectives on current and emerging AI applications across the EPC lifecycle, focusing on productivity, operational impact, and strategic considerations for both established firms and emerging disruptors.

Interactive polls and word clouds captured audience sentiment throughout the session, underscoring the importance of thoughtful adoption as AI continues to reshape EPC delivery models.



From left to right: Ganesh Venkataramanan, Vice President of Presales, Americas at AVEVA, Curtis Rodgers, Partner at Brick & Mortar; Jeff Danley, Director of Innovation at B&Mc; and Kyle Wetzold, Managing Director of Data Analytics at FTI Consulting

# Ctrl + Alt + Disrupt“, Rethinking EPC project delivery in the age of AI

## Q3 Event

### Key Takeaways

- Curiosity and experimentation will be rewarded as AI adoption accelerates
- AI is an enabler that augments roles and drives productivity, rather than replacing jobs
- Organizations are focused on effective deployment, recognizing AI as a layered, not standalone, solution
- The greatest performance gains come from automating repetitive, admin-heavy tasks
- Practical use cases are emerging in schedule analysis, risk assessment, and rapid data synthesis
- Data has become a strategic asset, with real-time insights reshaping project management and execution

### Role of AI

- Already embedded across industries
- Sustaining vs. Disruptive force
- Robotics & Automation surged in the last 3 years. We will continue to see growth in construction applications benefiting human safety in projects

### Challenges & Opportunities

- Regulatory & cybersecurity concerns remain high
- AI enables better project delivery, risk prediction
- Positive impact on labor gap in construction by being able to do more in the same time

### Workforce Impact

- Cannot fully replace human element
- Jobs will adapt; some obsolete, new ones emerge
- Key question: *How will workforce adapt?*



# Rice Global Forum 2025 Annual Gala

## Q4 Event

The Rice Global Forum 2025 Annual Gala brought together leaders from the engineering, construction, and energy sectors for an evening of celebration, connection, and inspiration. Guests enjoyed a networking reception and banquet dinner, followed by an engaging keynote address and the presentation of the RGF Awards for Excellence.

The evening was enhanced by distinguished guests offering unique perspectives. Jack Barsky, former KGB spy and author of *Deep Undercover*, shared insights on adaptability, resilience, and navigating American corporate culture, prompting reflection on leadership and transformation.

Dr. Phil Bedient, Rice University Professor of Environmental and Civil Engineering, highlighted the critical link between academia and industry, reinforcing Rice Global Forum's commitment to translating academic excellence into real-world impact.

Together, these perspectives highlighted the value of learning across disciplines and experiences, making the 2025 Annual Gala a memorable and impactful evening for the RGF community.



Networking Session



**Dr. Phil Bedient**  
Rice Professor of Environmental and Civil Engineering



**Jack Barsky**  
Former KGB Spy  
Speaker and Author

# Rice Global Forum 2025 Annual Gala

## Q4 Event

### Event Highlights

- Meaningful networking and industry dialogue celebrating excellence, leadership, and forward-looking innovation
- A diverse audience of accomplished engineering, construction, and energy leaders, each bringing deep expertise and unique perspectives
- A dynamic and entertaining keynote from a former KGB spy, offering a compelling perspective on adapting to American corporate culture



# Rice Global Forum 2025 Annual Gala

## Awards for Excellence

- Established in 2011 by the Rice Global E&C Forum, the Awards for Excellence honor individuals, teams, and organizations for remarkable contributions and outstanding achievements within the Engineering & Construction industry
- These prestigious awards are presented annually at the RGF Annual Forum to spotlight recent accomplishments and industry impact



**Bhaskar Patel**

2025 RGF Lifetime Achievement Award



**1PointFive Alliance**

2025 RGF Annual Excellence Award



**Industrial Craft Competition, Houston  
Livestock Show and Rodeo**

2025 Spirit of RGF Award

# Rice Student Engagement Events



# Energy in Transition Night

The Energy in Transition Night marked hosted at Rice University, the event brought together students, young professionals, and industry representatives for an evening focused on career pathways in the evolving energy landscape.

The program featured company presentations highlighting their role in the energy transition, current initiatives, and available career opportunities.

The evening concluded with a networking reception, allowing attendees to engage directly with industry leaders, recruiters, and technical professionals shaping the future of energy.



# Energy in Transition Night

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## Key Takeaways

- **Energy transition careers are accelerating:** Companies highlighted growing demand in carbon management, digital transformation, hydrogen, renewables, and sustainable operations.
- **Interdisciplinary skills matter:** Modern energy roles increasingly combine engineering, data science, policy, and business expertise.
- **Strong focus on early talent:** Organizations emphasized internships, graduate programs, and rotational development tracks.
- **Networking is essential:** Students gained direct access to recruiters, engineers, and hiring managers from leading firms.
- **Innovation and sustainability are central themes:** Both traditional and emerging energy companies reinforced their commitment to sustainable solutions.

**Participation from 10 major organizations**, representing a diverse cross-section of the energy value chain:

- Worley
- Technip
- Greenflash
- SLB
- Wood
- BASF
- S&B
- Primoris Services Corporation
- Burns & McDonnell
- ABB

# Texas A&M Joint Panel Session

## Overview

- A collaborative seminar to provide Texas A&M College of Engineering project management students with valuable industry insights, practical career guidance, and meaningful networking.
- Hosted by Texas A&M faculty, led by Professor Ivan Damjanovic, and supported by the expertise of Rice Global Forum and industry partners.

## Key Takeaways & Impact

- **Mentorship Matters:** Building strong mentor relationships accelerates career growth.
- **Leadership Opportunities:** Seek roles early to develop management skills.
- **Networking is Essential:** Industry connections open doors to internships and full-time roles.
- **Classroom Studies Meets The Real World:** Understanding real-world challenges complements academic learning.

## Highlights

- Panel discussions on early-career strategies, mentorship, leadership development, and navigating technical and commercial career paths, featuring Aspire members as panelists alongside industry leaders.
- Small-group roundtable conversations led by RGF Board Members, offering personalized guidance and direct industry engagement.



# Strategies in Energy Innovation

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On December 3, 2025, Rice Global Forum (RGF) hosted its third on-campus event at Rice University, bringing together Aspire RGF members, RGF members, and Rice students for a timely discussion on the future of energy innovation.

The evening opened with an interactive networking session at Huff House, followed by a moderated panel exploring resilience, risk, technology adoption, and workforce challenges across the energy sector. The discussion featured practical insights and active engagement with student questions.

The event concluded with closing remarks from a Rice Student Chair and the announcement of the re-launch of Aspire's mentorship program, reaffirming Aspire's commitment to developing the next generation of energy leaders.



From left to right: George Herman, Global Technology Team Lead for Enhanced Oil Recovery at BASF; Blayne Trahan, Project Manager at Turner Industries; Adam Green, Policy Expert at Worley Group Inc; and Andrew Rennie, Commercial Development Manager at S&B Engineers and Constructors.

# Strategies in Energy Innovation

## Key Takeaways

### Energy Landscape & Technology

- U.S. energy direction continues to shift with political administrations; current focus is on domestic, traditional energy sources
- Energy generation is only half the challenge — transmission capacity must grow in tandem
- Strong consensus that nuclear, especially SMRs, will play a key future role

### Barriers to Innovation

- U.S. energy direction continues to shift with political administrations; current focus is on domestic, traditional energy sources
- Energy generation is only half the challenge — transmission capacity must grow in tandem
- Strong consensus that nuclear, especially SMRs, will play a key future role

### Industry Workforce Realities

- Energy professionals should stay agile and adaptable to navigate ongoing transitions
- Skilled craft labor shortages are worsening as fewer individuals enter trades programs
- The United States remains the energy capital of the world



# Networking and Events Gallery



# Networking and Events Gallery



# Networking and Events Gallery



# What's Next for 2026



Increased Rice University On-Campus Engagement



Annual Gala – Prominent Keynotes & Panels



Collaboration Events with Texas A&M and Other Universities

4 Quarterly Events – New & Incredible Venues



Increased Standalone Networking Events



Aspire Program Calendar Events





Rice Global Forum