



34th Annual S.T.E.P. Purchasing

July 20–23, 2026

Meeting Policies & Participant Guide

Welcome to S.T.E.P. 2026

This document outlines the meeting policies, registration requirements, and participation guidelines for the 34th Annual S.T.E.P. Purchasing Conference. Please read it carefully before contacting vendors or distributors to schedule appointments.

S.T.E.P. is the National Marine Distributors Association's premier face-to-face purchasing event. It brings together distributors, manufacturers, and manufacturer's reps for structured, focused meetings over three full days. The format is simple: manufacturers host meetings in their suites, and buyers travel from room to room on their own schedule.

Distributor members receive their registration information approximately one week before manufacturers and reps. This is intentional — it gives distributors the opportunity to reach out and schedule their priority appointments before the broader meeting requests begin.

Registration

You must be registered with NMDA to attend any S.T.E.P. meeting, social function, or meal. Registration is not optional — it is a requirement for participation.

Who must register	Every participant — distributor, manufacturer, manufacturer's rep, and non-member — must complete registration and pay the applicable fee before attending any part of S.T.E.P.
NMDA member benefits	NMDA members receive significantly reduced registration fees and may book appointments on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. Tuesday meetings are reserved exclusively for NMDA members.
Non-member participants	Non-members may participate Wednesday and Thursday only. Invitations to non-member buyers and manufacturers are extended by NMDA in late May, after member companies have had several weeks to book their priority appointments.
No partial registration	Partial registrations are not accepted. Registration covers the full event — all meetings, lunches, and included social functions for the applicable tier.
Registration opens	Distributors: April 27, 2026 Manufacturers & Reps: May 4, 2026 Online registration: www.nmdaonline.com/s-t-e-p-registration/
Cancellation policy	No refund on cancellations after June 24, 2026.



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Meeting length	All meetings are a minimum of 40 minutes. If both parties agree, meetings may be scheduled for longer. The exception is Wednesday afternoon "mini-meetings," which are 15 minutes each and are designed for introductions to new or new-to-you vendors.
How meetings are scheduled	There is no computer matching. Each participant is responsible for contacting the other party directly to propose and confirm meeting times. NMDA provides the contact lists — you set your own schedule.
Where meetings are held	Manufacturers host all meetings in their suites. Distributors and reps travel from suite to suite. NMDA will provide a suite assignment list once rooms have been assigned.
Tuesday meetings	Tuesday is NMDA members only. No non-member companies may hold or attend meetings on Tuesday, regardless of whether they are registered for Wednesday and Thursday.
Wednesday & Thursday meetings	Open to both NMDA members and registered non-member companies. NMDA members may meet with non-members on these days, and non-members may meet with any registered participant.
NMDA member meetings Wed–Thu	NMDA members may meet with other NMDA members on any of the three meeting days — Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday.
Non-member invitations	If there is a non-member buyer or manufacturer you would like to have invited to S.T.E.P., contact the NMDA office with their information. The committee will review and, if appropriate, send registration materials. Not all buyers or manufacturers are eligible to participate.

Meeting Schedule Submission

Important: Schedule Deadline — June 24, 2026

Your completed meeting schedule must be submitted to the NMDA office by:

Wednesday, June 24, 2026

Submit by email to: office@nmdaonline.com | Or fax to: 865.518.6197

Please use the times noted in the Conference Time Planner when scheduling your meetings. Submitting your schedule on time ensures the event runs smoothly for all participants and confirms your participation for planning purposes.



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When scheduling your meetings, please keep the following in mind:

- You set the length and time of each meeting — but please stay within the time slots shown in the Conference Time Planner
- Do not schedule appointments during the Wednesday Supplier of the Year Luncheon (11:45 AM – 1:30 PM)
- Mini-meetings on Wednesday afternoon (4:45–6:00 PM) are 15 minutes each
- Submit one consolidated schedule covering all three meeting days (Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday)

Hotel & Attendance

Host hotel	Embassy Suites by Hilton Chicago O'Hare Rosemont, Rosemont, IL. All participants must stay at the host hotel to participate in S.T.E.P. In the event of a hotel sellout, NMDA will designate an overflow hotel.
Hotel booking	Hotel room booking links will be emailed to registered participants by the NMDA office. Do not attempt to book directly — different participant types use different booking links. You will receive your link by email after your registration is confirmed.
Length of stay	You are only required to stay for the days on which you have meetings. You do not need to attend the full event.
Check-in / check-out	Check-in is at 3:00 PM. Check-out is at 12:00 Noon. If you need an early check-in or late check-out, book your room and appointments accordingly.

What's Included in Your Registration

	NMDA Members	Non-Members
Meeting days available	Tuesday, Wednesday & Thursday	Wednesday & Thursday only
Tuesday lunch	✓ Included	—
Wednesday lunch	✓ Included	✓ Included
Thursday lunch	✓ Included	✓ Included
Monday evening reception	✓ Included	✓ Included
Tuesday evening reception	✓ Included	✓ Included



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Quick Reference — Key Policies

Remember

- Meetings are 40 minutes minimum — longer if both parties agree
- Mini-meetings on Wednesday afternoon are 15 minutes each
- Manufacturers host meetings in their suite living rooms — buyers travel to them
- Tuesday meetings are NMDA members ONLY
- Wednesday and Thursday are open to NMDA members AND registered non-members
- You must be registered to attend ANY meeting, meal, or social function
- There is no computer matching — you contact vendors/buyers directly to set appointments
- Your meeting schedule is due to NMDA by June 24, 2026 — email office@nmdaonline.com
- You must stay at the host hotel to participate

Questions?

Contact the NMDA office — we are happy to help.

Emily Saving, Executive Director

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