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SME Taps Melissa Russell as Incoming Executive Director and CEO to Guide Next Era of Growth and Innovation

Englewood, CO - The [Society for Mining, Metallurgy & Exploration](https://www.smenet.org) (SME) has announced that Melissa Russell will become its next Executive Director and CEO. She will begin transitioning into the role over the coming months as Dave Kanagy, CAE, prepares to retire after 21 years of leadership.

Russell will officially assume the title of Incoming Executive Director and CEO on Sept. 29, 2025. She departs her current role as Executive Director of the [IEEE Computer Society](https://www.ieee.org)—the largest of IEEE's 39 technical societies, with more than 50,000 members across 150 countries. Since joining the Computer Society in June 2018, Russell has strengthened its global presence, financial sustainability and strategic humanitarian initiatives.



"I am honored to begin this new chapter with SME and inspired by the vital role this community plays in shaping our world," said Russell. "I look forward to listening, learning, and working alongside this remarkable group of professionals to advance innovation, champion sustainability, and create a brilliant future together."

With more than 30 years of experience in nonprofit association management, Russell has led efforts to expand membership, international conferences, publications and training programs. She is a recognized leader in the field and has contributed to global conversations on sustainability, artificial intelligence, quantum computing, workplace equity, inclusive leadership and social impact.

“Melissa brings remarkable leadership skills to SME. Her depth of experience in association management, combined with a strong background in AI and technology, was exciting to us,” said Mary Korpi, SME president-elect and chair of the Executive Director Search Committee. “We’re enthusiastic about what she can accomplish with an organization like SME, which is already in a strong financial position.”

A search committee composed of industry experts was tasked with identifying a leader who could build on SME’s financial growth under Kanagy’s tenure and guide the Society through future technological transformations that will benefit the mining and underground construction industries.

Russell joins SME as Kanagy steps down from a role he has held for more than two decades. Under his leadership, the Society experienced unprecedented growth in both finances and membership. Russell will work alongside Kanagy during a transition period leading up to his retirement in March 2026. This changeover ensures a smooth transfer of institutional knowledge, strategic insight and continuity of excellence.

More About Melissa Russell

Before her tenure at IEEE, Russell spent 17 years at the Optical Society (OSA, now OPTICA), where she held several leadership roles. Most recently, she served as Chief Meetings and Industry Officer, overseeing nearly 70 annual events, two major tradeshow and a portfolio of industry programs supporting nearly 300 corporate members.

Earlier in her career, she worked with the National School Boards Association and the Print Services Distribution Association (formerly DMIA), focusing on marketing and advertising—building a strong foundation in strategic communications and decision-making.

Russell holds a Bachelor of Arts in journalism with a specialization in advertising from The Ohio State University. She has received the Golden Core Recognition from the IEEE Computer Society; as well as the Spirit of the CS Award, for outstanding contributions and service to the society.

About SME

The Society for Mining, Metallurgy & Exploration (SME) brings together the mining and mineral industry's brightest and most dedicated professionals. Over 14,000 global members advance their careers with the world-class technical resources, educational programs, networking opportunities and professional development tools from SME. Our members are focused on sharing best practices for safety, environmental stewardship and moving mining forward. SME. *Inspiring mining professionals worldwide.*