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npelra.org/2026

NATIONAL PELRA

APRIL 19-22, 2026 • CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA



55th Annual Training Conference

2026

CHARLOTTE ANNUAL TRAINING CONFERENCE

Aundrea Cordle

Conference Chair and Executive Vice President

Fairfield County, OH



Dear Colleagues and Friends,

On behalf of the planning committee, it is my absolute pleasure to welcome you to the 2026 Charlotte Conference! We are thrilled to host you in the vibrant city of Charlotte, where innovation, collaboration, and opportunity converge.

This year's conference promises to be an exciting and enriching experience, filled with dynamic sessions, thought-provoking discussions, and cutting-edge insights across our field of public sector labor relations. Whether you're a seasoned professional or new to the community, this is your space to grow, connect, and be inspired.

Beyond the sessions, we've built in countless opportunities for networking and building lasting relationships. The energy and expertise each of you brings is what makes this event so powerful — and we can't wait to see the conversations, partnerships, and ideas that emerge.

Thank you for being here and for contributing to the success of this incredible gathering. Let's make the 2026 Charlotte ATC one to remember!

Aundrea Cordle

2026

PRE-CONFERENCE SESSIONS (SUNDAY)

Separate registrations required for all pre-conference sessions

PC-1: COSTING ACADEMY | 8:00AM - 4:00PM

Grand Ballroom - B

Ben Gehrt, Clark Baird Smith | Patrick Glynn, Boldpath Consulting

This Academy will cover techniques and approaches to costing, as well as provide you with the tools to be better prepared at the bargaining table to successfully argue and negotiate your positions. Through the use of interactive discussion and exercises, participants will explore alternative methodologies and identify key financial components, including hidden and often overlooked elements of a labor agreement, in order to accurately determine the actual total cost to your jurisdiction.

*Personal laptop required; Excel for HR Webinar Highly encouraged
Breakfast and lunch included

Morning Pre-Conference: 9:30am - 12:00pm

PC-2: SHAW HR CONSULTING

Alison Spalinger

2-Part Workshop

- So...What is a Reasonable Accommodation, Really?
- The Underused Tool in your FMLA Tool Box

PC-3: PERSUASION FLYWHEEL

Holland Atkinson | *Hennepin County, MN*

This dynamic presentation flips the script by introducing a transformative concept known as the Persuasion Flywheel, designed specifically to convert proposals and concepts into compelling narratives that decision-makers readily support.

2026

PRE-CONFERENCE SESSIONS (SUNDAY)

Separate registrations required
for all pre-conference sessions

Afternoon Pre-Conference: 1:00pm - 3:30pm

PC-4: CONDUCTING SWIFT AND THOROUGH WORKPLACE INVESTIGATIONS: TIPS FOR PUBLIC EMPLOYERS

Liana Reeves, Christine Slattery | *Miller Nash*

Responding carefully (and quickly) to complaints of harassment, discrimination, or retaliation is crucial for employers when trying to maintain a positive and productive workplace and avoid litigation.

PC-5: LR + HR 101 - INTRO SESSION

This two-part session is designed for new and emerging LR/HR professionals. The session begins with a 45-minute legal overview covering essential LR/HR 101 topics. Participants will then move into a “choose-your-own-adventure” format, selecting four (4) of seven (7) facilitated roundtable discussions to explore a variety of timely issues and spark conversations that will continue throughout the conference.

Prefer a visual guide?

[Click here to download a session summary.](#)

This session is ideal for first-time conference attendees, those new to the public sector, or anyone looking for an engaging entry point into LR/HR topics. Registration is free but requested to assist with room setup and logistics.

2026

PRE-CONFERENCE SESSIONS + WELCOME RECEPTION (SUNDAY)

Separate registrations required
for all pre-conference sessions

First-Timers Reception

4:45pm - 5:45pm

Brooklyn Village (1st FL) | *Separate Invitation Required*

55th Annual Conference Welcome Celebration

6:00pm - 9:00pm

NASCAR Hall of Fame

Get ready to kick off the 2026 Annual Conference in high gear at the legendary NASCAR Hall of Fame in Charlotte! Join us for an unforgettable evening of high-octane fun, music, and interactive excitement.

🎵 Back by Popular Demand: The Cluster Shucks return after their crowd-favorite performance in Savannah, bringing their soulful sound and energy to Charlotte!

🏆 Put Your Skills to the Test:

- Team up and compete in the Fastest Pit Stop Challenge
- Take the wheel in our Simulated Driver Experience and race for bragging rights!

Rev up your networking, connect with colleagues, and celebrate the start of an incredible conference — all in one epic, engine-roaring night.



You won't want to miss this ride!

2026

MONDAY SESSIONS

Meals are for registered conference attendees + exhibitors

Guided Morning Walks Westin Hotel Lobby

6:30am | Just show up! Leaves on time

7:30AM - 8:30AM
GRAND BALLROOM C/D

BREAKFAST

Catered breakfast for Conference attendees + exhibitors

8:30AM - 8:45AM
GRAND BALLROOM C/D

OPENING CONFERENCE REMARKS

National PELRA Board of Directors President
Roxanne Bonner

8:45AM - 9:45AM

OPENING KEYNOTE: RACHEL SHAW

Grand Ballroom C/D

Rachel Shaw will inspire and challenge you with an insightful session designed to remind you of your importance in the public sector and provide the tools to thrive throughout your career. Let's work together to keep the best talent engaged in this essential work.



Choose Your Adventure:

Attend Workshop or choose from Concurrent Sessions

10:00AM - 12:30PM

W1: Prompting in Practice: A Hands-On Workshop for Public Sector Use of Generative AI

Patrick Glynn, Boldpath Consulting

This workshop is designed for attendees who want to move beyond basic AI awareness and start applying it to real problems. It will focus on prompting—how to frame questions and tasks in ways that produce useful, accurate, and relevant outputs from generative AI tools like ChatGPT. No technical background is needed.

C1: The Costing Proposals and Use of Economic & Demographic Data in Negotiations and Beyond

10:00AM
-
11:00AM

Jonathan Downes, Zashin & Rich

Economic costs of proposals in negotiations is multi-layered. Economic data includes comparable jurisdictions, multiple budget issues, and local and national trends in the economy. Demographic data is mostly forgotten as a useful comparative tool.

C2: Trauma on the Team During Economic Divergency and Workforce Instability

10:00AM
-
11:00AM

Myla Hite, Transformation WRX

There is much talk relating to grief and trauma when employees throughout an organization undergo unexpected change to their livelihood. Management and Labor can support employees during unexpected changes by implementing strategies to help mitigate the impact of these transitions.

C3: Behind the Curtain at Shaw HR Consulting & Rachel Shaw, Inc. | Title Sponsor

10:00AM
-
11:00AM

"I love your sessions, but I'm not exactly sure how or when an organization engages you." This is not a traditional educational session. It is a candid conversation about what we do, who it's for, and when it makes sense to engage us

2026

MONDAY SESSIONS

Meals are for registered conference attendees + exhibitors

If you chose concurrent sessions, here is Part 2:

**10:00AM - 12:30PM
(Continued)**

W1: Prompting in Practice: A Hands-On Workshop for Public Sector Use of Generative AI

Patrick Glynn, Boldpath Consulting

This workshop is designed for attendees who want to move beyond basic AI awareness and start applying it to real problems. It will focus on prompting—how to frame questions and tasks in ways that produce useful, accurate, and relevant outputs from generative AI tools like ChatGPT. No technical background is needed.

C4: Leveraging Neurodiversity in the Workplace

Andria Williams, City of Columbus, OH

11:15AM

-

12:30PM

This course will introduce neurodiversity and its importance for managers, but it is open to all. It will demonstrate how organizations can improve workplace practices to be more inclusive for neurodivergent individuals, and ultimately, better support all employees.

C5: Building fair & defensible systems that promote equity (without saying 'DEI' out loud)
Jada Kent, Sarah Town | Baker Tilly

11:15AM

-

12:30PM

Public sector organizations are performing sophisticated pay equity analyses that go beyond simple gender checks. In this session, we review how pay studies that incorporate gender, race, and age can transform compensation systems, ensuring fairness and demonstrating compliance, all under the radar in politically sensitive environments.

C6: Exhibitor Solutions Session

11:15AM

-

12:30PM

Engage in a direct presentation from one of the skilled professional partners
Session Pending; To Be Confirmed

15TH ANNUAL ROBIN HALL AWARDS LUNCH

Open to all attendees

12:30pm - 1:30pm

Grand Ballroom C/D



2026

MONDAY AFTERNOON

Social events are for conference attendees and their paid guests

1:30PM - 2:30PM

C7: Lessons Learned: AFSCME DC33 Strike

Carlton Williams, City of Philadelphia, PA

The Summer 2025 strike became highly visible and political. This session will share experiences managing the operational side of a strike - what will you do when photos of trash piles are making headlines and evening news.

1:30PM - 2:30PM

C8: It's High Time We Talk About It

Jeffrey Jacobs, Arbitrator

This session will get into Marijuana - discussion of testing, what impacts outcomes as far as proof of impairment, how ER policies can greatly impact these cases and how medical cards affect outcomes in states where marijuana is legal under some circumstances.

1:30PM - 2:30PM

C9: Finding your Management Style: Lessons from Ted Lasso, Michael Scott, and Ron Swanson

Drew Esposito, Clemans, Nelson & Associates

In this engaging session, we explore the contrasting yet insightful leadership philosophies of three iconic (and fictional) managers: the endlessly optimistic Ted Lasso, the well-meaning but chaotic Michael Scott, and the stoically independent Ron Swanson.

1:30PM - 2:30PM

C10: Beyond the Welcome Wagon: Onboarding Gen Z Hires for Lasting Success

Vanessa Zamy, LiberationX Contracts

Gen Z will make up 30% of the workforce by 2030, and like every generation, they want to feel engaged and valued at work—not quit on day one. In this session, Vanessa Zamy shares practical strategies to build a resilient, future-ready workforce so new hires don't just survive, but thrive from day one.

2:45PM - 4:15PM

P2: Just Cause: Not Just 'Cause I Want To!

Holland Atkinson, Hennepin County, MN

Labor relations expert Holland Atkinson takes the audience on a journey through two extraordinary, recent arbitration cases—one from Minnesota, one from Ohio—that expose the razor-thin line between justified discipline and fatal missteps.

Conference Networking Social

4:30pm - 6:00pm

2nd Floor Promenade; Outside the Grand Ballroom

Join us for a casual networking reception. This is a perfect opportunity to reconnect with old friends, meet new ones before heading out with your chapter for dinner and an evening exploring downtown Charlotte.

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2026

TUESDAY SESSIONS

Meals are for registered conference attendees + exhibitors

Guided Morning Walks Westin Hotel Lobby

6:30am | *Just show up! Leaves on time*

7:30AM - 8:30AM
GRAND BALLROOM C/D

Breakfast

Catered breakfast for Conference attendees + exhibitors

8:30AM - 10:00AM
GRAND BALLROOM C/D

P3: Collective Bargaining Trends Around the Nation

Ben Gehrt, Bob Smith | Clark Baird Smith

Attendees will learn of significant collective bargaining trends and developments that will include a review of leading economic indicators affecting the process. Presenters will offer their suggestions for meeting current bargaining challenges. The latest results of the National PELRA collective bargaining survey will also be presented and discussed.

10:30AM - 11:45AM

C11: Beyond Bargaining: Building a Culture of Connection

Serilda Summers-McGee, Workplace Change

This session will blend strategic insights with real-world case studies, workplace scenarios, and collaborative exercises to explore how to build a proactive union strategy, recognize and de-escalate high-risk issues, and respond effectively to negative press, strikes, or workplace disruptions. This is not theory, it's a practical, roll-up-your-sleeves session.

10:30AM - 11:45AM

C12: The Future of Public Sector Hiring: Next-Gen AI Tools & Recruitment Marketing Strategies

Michael Hurwitz, Careers in Government

It incorporates the latest tools, strategies, and insights in AI-driven recruitment marketing, with real-world public sector applications and forward-thinking tactics. Attendees will leave with actionable solutions tailored for the challenges of 2026 and beyond.

10:30AM - 11:45AM

C13: Effective and Enforceable Last Chance Agreements

Ben Gehrt, Roxana Underwood | Clark Baird Smith

This session will help attendees learn when to most effectively use last chance agreements, and how to write them to make sure they will be upheld and enforced by an arbitrator. Last Chance Agreements can be a great tool to resolve disciplinary investigations, avoid arbitration, and ultimately help end the employment relationship if the employee does not take full advantage of the chance he or she has been offered.

10:30AM - 11:45AM

C14: The Myth or Reality of Work-Life Balance: Redefining Success and Wellness in a 24/7 World

Juliet Kuehne, Sun Counseling & Wellness

This session will explore the evolving nature of work-life balance, its challenges, and alternative approaches to integrating work and personal priorities in a meaningful way. Participants will gain insights into how societal expectations, personal values, and workplace dynamics influence their perception of balance and discover strategies for cultivating well-being in a demanding world.

Conference Lunch

11:45am - 1:00pm

Brief remarks from National PELRA
Foundation and Title Sponsor

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2026

TUESDAY AFTERNOON

Social events are for conference attendees and their paid guests

Appreciation to Title Sponsor:



1:15PM - 2:30PM

C15: Lifting as We Climb: The Power of Mentorship, Sponsorship, and Allyship **Paris Lampkins, PRADCO**

This session explores the unique and connected roles of mentors, sponsors, and allies. We will talk about how mentors guide, how sponsors advocate and create opportunities, and how allies build safe and inclusive spaces. Participants will learn real-world strategies to build strong relationships, support rising talent, and create a culture where all leaders can thrive.

1:15PM - 2:30PM

C16: Learning From Pitfalls and Missteps Made During Class And Comp Studies **TL Cox, Michael Verdoon | SEGAL**

Learning objectives include how to communicate clearly what you're hoping to achieve as a result of your project; how to structure a study, the type and levels of input beneficial from different stakeholders; and how and when to communicate, with key leadership, unions, and the broader workforce

1:15PM - 2:30PM

C17: Use of External Law in Arbitration

Jeffrey Jacobs, Arbitrator

This topic will discuss how external law, i.e., states, regulations and administrative or judicial rulings might impact a labor arbitration case. There is disagreement on the basic question. Some view the law as the governing set of rules, others say that the contract is their governing document no matter what the external law is.

1:15PM - 2:30PM

C18: Bridging the Divide: Public Safety Chiefs and HR/LR Professionals

Jeremy Moore, Broken Arrow, OK | Andrew Haines, National PELRA

This session will explore the relationship of a Chief of Police and Fire Chief, with the HR staff. When HR and public safety leadership are not aligned, operational challenges can arise, including delays in hiring, inconsistent handling of employee issues, and breakdowns in policy enforcement. This session explores how to build or maintain an effective operational relationship.

2:45PM - 4:00PM

P4: Annual FLSA Update

Lisa Charbonneau, Liebert Cassidy Whitmore

This session provides a timely update on recent and proposed changes to the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) and their implications for employers. Key topics may cover the Department of Labor's revised overtime thresholds, evolving definitions of exempt vs. non-exempt employees, and best practices for maintaining compliance amid regulatory changes

2026 Conference Celebration Events

Explore Charlotte + Music Bingo!

5:00pm - 6:30pm Scavenger Hunt | 6:30pm - 8:30pm Music Bingo/Celebration

Have a Great Race-style experience—without the racing! Participants will explore downtown Charlotte while completing a scavenger hunt for prizes, then wrap up the evening with music bingo and live entertainment.

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2026

WEDNESDAY SESSIONS

Meals are for registered conference attendees + exhibitors

Annual Business Meeting

8:00am - 8:45am

All are welcome

National PELRA Foundation

Raffle Drawings!

10:10am - 10:30am

7:30AM - 8:30AM

Breakfast

Catered Breakfast for Conference attendees + exhibitors

8:45AM - 10:00AM

P5: Bees, Knees and Tweets

Gregory A. Hearing, Bush Graziano Rice & Hearing

Back after popular demand to be a plenary session. Understanding the limitations of public employee free speech rights in turbulent times is ever-evolving and this session will update attendees on recent cases around the nation.

10:45AM - 11:45AM

C19: Workplace Investigations

Douglas Duckett, Duckett Law Firm

This session will provide an overview of best practices for conducting thorough, fair, and legally compliant investigations into employee complaints and misconduct. The session will cover steps for planning an investigation, interviewing involved parties, analyzing evidence, and determining outcomes.

10:45AM - 11:45AM

C20: From Onboarding to Offboarding: The Employee Experience Revolution

Barb Utrup, Columbus State Community College

Employee expectations are higher than ever and companies that fail to meet them risk losing top talent. In this session, go behind the scenes of this growing role to explore how employee experience influences culture, connection, and outcomes. Attendees will gain actionable strategies to elevate the everyday work experience.

10:45AM - 11:45AM

C21: AI, Automation & Workforce Transformation

Drew Esposito, Amanda Riess | Clemans Nelson & Associates

Artificial Intelligence and automation are no longer future concepts; it is reshaping industries, roles, and the skills required to thrive. As new technologies are integrated into operations, the workforce must adapt in real time. But what does that transformation actually look like? And how can leaders and employees alike stay ahead of the curve without losing sight of human potential?

10:45AM - 11:45AM

C22: The Resilient HR Leader: How to Stay Strategic Without Burning Out

Kristen Wade, HR Higher Version

This session explores how HR professionals can create sustainable success by managing their time, energy, and attention more strategically. Learn a practical approach to prioritization, boundary-setting, and recovering from "urgency addiction," so you can stay focused on the work that matters most - without sacrificing your well-being.

Lunch-On-Your-Own

11:45am - 1:00pm

Explore Downtown Charlotte Eateries

#npelra2026

2026

WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON

*Must be present after closing plenary to win free 2027 Fort Worth Registration

1:15PM - 2:15PM

C23: Succession Planning “From Checklist to Culture”

Jennifer Miglietti, City of Dublin, OH | Bob Welsh, Leverage Leadership

In this highly interactive session, Jennifer and Bob will present their work to stand up succession planning. They will share insights on the design approach, the actions to build engagement, the targeted skills development solutions, and the initial results from this work. Participants will leave the session with clear next steps to start aligning support for this critical process.

1:15PM - 2:15PM

C24: Protected Status Check: The State of Employment Discrimination Law

Abby Rogers, Ryan Gillespie | Engler Callaway Baasten & Sraga

This session will review recent EEO developments along with practical evaluation of these developments to support HR professionals in developing a solid strategy for navigating EEO compliance issues. Attendees will leave with a solid understanding of key considerations in this current environment that will help insulate employers from potential discrimination claims.

1:15PM - 2:15PM

C25: Navigating Employee Substance Abuse: Physiology, Testing, and Adjudication

Nick Konves, Asst. Chief of Police; City of Columbus, OH

Session offers a comprehensive overview of the physiology of alcohol and drug use, foundational insight into how substances affect the body and behavior. Topics include key considerations in alcohol and drug testing, types of tests, limitations, best practices for implementation along with strategies for adjudicating disciplinary cases involving substance use, focusing on due process, documentation, and mitigating legal risks.

1:15PM - 2:15PM

C26: The Road Less Traveled: Enhancing Compliance Through Negotiations

Yvette Heintzelman, Kaitlin Salisbury | Clark Hill

The presenters will discuss the interplay between policy, employment laws and labor laws and how negotiators can protect management rights while incorporating provisions designed to facilitate workplace management and/or compliance with federal and state employment laws and policy provisions such as FLMA, ADA (fitness for duty/reasonable accommodation), due process, Title VII and the FLSA.

2:30PM - 4:00PM

P6: The Power of Advocacy and Resiliency

McKinnon Galloway

Lighting the Silent Path – My Story. For nearly a decade, from ages 16 to 25, my life revolved around a relentless cycle of hospital visits, chemotherapy sessions, and surgeries, all while striving to excel academically. Yet, amidst the chaos, a beacon of purpose emerged when, at 25, I was elected national ambassador for the Children’s Tumor Foundation of NYC. It was a role that allowed me to amplify my voice, advocating for NF2 research and support on national and international platforms.

Attend the closing plenary session and be inspired by the power of advocacy and resilience. Leave energized and ready to apply the insights and training from the past three days to create a stronger, more impactful tomorrow.



FREE 2027 Fort Worth Registration Drawing!

Exhibitor Bingo Raffle Draw

4:05PM

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2026

THURSDAY POST-CONFERENCE

Separate registration required

PC6: Academy 2: The Grievance Arbitration Process

Roxana M. Underwood, *Clark Baird Smith*

Academy 2 teaches participants about the role of arbitration in union-management relations from the perspective of the practitioner, the arbitrator, and the advocate. This workshop addresses responding to a grievance, rules of contract administration and how and when to raise the question of arbitrability. Participants will draft a response to a grievance and learn how to improve their skills in preparing and presenting a winning case. Interactive exercises throughout the day in choosing an arbitrator and selecting witnesses are designed to build expertise. The last exercise of the Academy, based on videos and facts of the case, you get to be the arbitrator and determine the ruling.

8:00AM - 4:00PM



See You in Fort Worth!
April 11-14, 2027

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