



SPEAKER LINEUP + SESSION DESCRIPTIONS



WHEN THE NATION IS WATCHING: MEDIA RELATIONS DURING THE DECKER GIRLS INVESTIGATION

Sheriff Mike Morrison, Chelan County Sheriff's Office

This session is an inside look at the communications response during the 2025 Decker girls investigation, which included managing intense media interest, public expectations, misinformation, and the pressure of communicating during an evolving, high-profile case.

This session breaks down how the Chelan County Sheriff's Office handled communications during the incident, lessons learned, and best practices – all without a designated Public Information Officer on staff.

About Sheriff Mike Morrison: Sheriff Mike Morrison is the 19th elected Sheriff in the 126-year history of the Chelan County Sheriff's Office and a law enforcement professional with more than 20 years of service. He holds a Bachelor's Degree in Law and Justice from Central Washington University and has completed advanced leadership training through the FBI Trilogy Program, FBI LEEDS (82nd Session), National Sheriffs' Institute (119th Session), the West Point Leadership Course, and Washington State CJTC Mid- and Executive-Level Certifications.

Throughout his career, Sheriff Morrison has served in specialized and leadership assignments, including SWAT, High Angle Rope Rescue, Search and Rescue, Swift Water Rescue, Emergency Vehicle Operations, School Resource Officer, Field Training Officer, and Union President. A recipient of two Life Saving Awards, he has led the Sheriff's Office through complex emergencies and critical incidents while strengthening partnerships, responsibly managing public resources, and maintaining a commitment to integrity, professionalism, accountability, and public trust.





MORE THAN A POST: BUILDING INFLUENCER STRATEGIES THAT REACH MULTIPLE GENERATIONS

Abbey Lampert, Port of Seattle

Influencer marketing isn't just for lifestyle brands and viral moments. It's a powerful, often underused tool for public sector communicators trying to reach increasingly fragmented and multi-generational audiences.

This session breaks down how government agencies can thoughtfully and effectively work with influencers across platforms, from social media creators to community voices and industry experts. We'll explore how different types of influencers help meet people where they are, whether that's short-form video, blogs, newsletters, or in-person events.

Using real-world examples from Port-wide communications campaigns, this session will walk through how influencer strategies can support major initiatives, improve public understanding, and build trust across generations. You'll learn how to identify the right partners, launch collaborations with limited resources, and integrate influencer efforts into your broader communications strategy without it feeling like a one-off tactic.

About Abbey Lampert: Abbey is a public sector communications leader and social media strategist with more than 15 years of experience in government communications. She leads social media and influencer strategy for the Port of Seattle, helping connect communities with the Port's work across aviation, maritime, economic development, and environmental stewardship.

As the voice behind more than 10 social media channels, including Seattle-Tacoma International Airport (SEA), Abbey has led communications for major capital projects, customer experience initiatives, crisis events, and viral moments. She also oversees the Port's influencer program, partnering with creators to reach new audiences through authentic, community-focused storytelling. Abbey specializes in turning complex topics into engaging content that informs, connects, and builds trust.

Her work has been recognized by PRSA Puget Sound, Airports Council International–North America, and Government Social Media for excellence in responsive communications, customer experience, campaign communications, and marketing communications.



THE GOLDEN GIRLS GUIDE TO INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

Angie Millar, City of Sammamish

This session brings a little Golden Girls charm to the art of connecting with your workforce and explores how to balance internal communications alongside competing priorities, while still creating content that's clear, engaging, and actually gets read.

Learn practical strategies for elevating your internal newsletter, writing executive emails, and making the most of LinkedIn to support employee engagement—served with just the right mix of wit, warmth, and real-world insight. In this



session, you'll learn how to make content worth reading, using the right channels strategically, and balance with intention, not perfection.

About Angie Millar: DiAngelea (Angie) Millar is the Communications Manager for the City of Sammamish. She was previously the Digital Communications Strategist for the City of SeaTac and a former Twitter personality for WSDOT.

She spent four and a half years teaching high school journalism in her home state of Texas, becoming one of the youngest advisors to win both a Gold Crown from the Columbia Scholastic Press Association and a Pacemaker award from the National Scholastic Press Association. In her spare time, she teaches Zumba and Hip Hop dance fitness classes in West Seattle.



ALL FOR ONE AND ONE FOR ALL: A PANEL DISCUSSION ON BEING A TEAM OF ONE

Moderated by Nathan MacDonald, City of Lynnwood

With dwindling budgets and the growing demands from elected leaders, more and more communicators are being asked to be everything to everyone within an organization. Teams of one or two are tasked with a seemingly insurmountable challenge, but it's not impossible.

This panel discussion will explore these challenges while providing tips on establishing effective workflows, empowering other employees, and advocating for your role.

Panelists include: Chelsea Shepherd, Tacoma Fire Department; DiAngela (Angie) Millar, City of Sammamish; and Natasha Ryan, City of Edmonds

About Nathan MacDonald: Nathan is a dynamic communications leader and lifelong public servant committed to empowering communities and inspiring positive change. As the Communications and Public Affairs Manager for the City of Lynnwood, Nathan brings extensive experience developing and executing communications strategies from his years in higher education, public utilities, and municipal government. He holds both a bachelor's degree from Abilene Christian University and a master's in Integrated Marketing Communications from Florida State University.

Nathan currently lives in Seattle with his amazing wife, Megan, and is the proud parent of six-year-old twins and a geriatric cat named Samantha. You can usually find him shopping and taking photos around Pike Place Market or exploring the million other awesome sites the Pacific Northwest has to offer.





ENGAGING INTERNAL AUDIENCES THROUGH PODCASTING

Vicki Alonzo, Auburn School District

The Auburn School District recently concluded their third podcast season with more than 8,000 downloads of their 50+ episodes. Starting with zero experience, knowledge or equipment, this platform is now a staple of their internal (and external) communication tools.

This session explains how to get started, software and hardware considerations, and best practices.

Come learn how easy it can be to connect with your audiences via podcasting!

About Vicki Alonzo: Vicki serves as Executive Director of Communications for the Auburn School District, where she leads internal and external communications, crisis and emergency messaging, community engagement and media relations. As a member of the Superintendent's Cabinet, she contributes to districtwide leadership and serves on committees focused on safety, strategic planning, equity and organizational leadership.

Throughout her career, Vicki has worked to strengthen the relationships between schools, families, staff and the community by telling the amazing stories of public education. She oversees district communications platforms, staff recognition programs, special events and public information initiatives that support student and staff success. She also has extensive experience with school district elections. Vicki is passionate about the role communications plays in creating strong communities.

Outside of work she is an avid reader, hockey fan, wine enthusiast and recent E-bike owner who loves traveling and spending time with family and friends.



CONNECTING IN A CRISIS: BUILDING PUBLIC TRUST THROUGH EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS

Rachel Terlep + Kira Kallem, Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT)

Learn how WSDOT uses social media to inform, educate, and build trust before, during, and after emergencies. This session explores practical strategies for using digital communication effectively in high-pressure situations, followed by a panel discussion and live audience Q&A.



About Rachel Terlep: Rachel is the statewide social media manager for the Washington State Department of Transportation, where she oversees strategy, content creation, and community management for a cumulative audience of 2.2 million followers. In 2025, WSDOT was named KING 5's Best Local Influencer. Previously, Rachel managed social media for the Washington State Department of Natural Resources and for Indiana University. When she's not agonizing over the perfect audio pairing for a Reel, she's statistically somewhere deep in the forest or in her garden.



Rachel has been a recognized voice in public sector social media for more than 10 years and regularly speaks at conferences about the art and science of building meaningful connections with digital communities. Her work has been featured in national and international outlets like The New York Times, The Guardian, Newsweek, Axios, and PBS.

She earned a Bachelor of Science in journalism from the University of Southern Indiana in 2010.

About Kira Kallem: Kira is the social media lead for WSDOT's Northwest Region, where she spends her days translating roadwork, traffic impacts, and transportation projects into content people can actually understand. A lifelong Washingtonian, Kira grew up raising pigs through 4-H, playing soccer, and finding any excuse to be creative.

A graduate of Eastern Washington University, Kira has spent the past decade working in design, video production, and digital communications across both agency and public-sector roles. She began her career at a creative agency, leading the design team and developing marketing campaigns, video content, and brand storytelling for clients across a variety of industries. Before joining WSDOT, she served as a Multimedia Producer for Parks Tacoma, where she led video production and social media strategy.

Kira is passionate about visual storytelling, public service, and helping organizations connect with the communities they serve through creative, accessible communication.



RETHINKING TOWN HALLS: STRUCTURED CONVERSATIONS FOR STRONGER PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Una McAlinden, Creative Strategy Solutions

Community engagement is a critical part of any public agency's work, but for many communicators and PIOs it often feels performative, unproductive, and exhausting. Participation is low, the feedback you do get is hard to use, and leaders often depend on input from a limited set of voices. What if you could redesign those moments into authentic, meaningful conversations that surface real insights, build trust with your community, and give leaders clearer, more reliable direction? This session will show you how to move beyond the open mic and check-the-box engagement toward structured, participatory conversations that generate credible insight you can confidently take back to policymakers.

In this interactive session, certified facilitator Una McAlinden will guide you through a practical framework for leading focused, engaging, and effective public-facing meetings. You'll experience the Technology of Participation (ToP) Focused Conversation method firsthand and, through peer discussions and an inside look at how the questions and flow are designed, learn how to clarify meeting purpose, invite diverse (and diverging) input, and guide discussions toward actionable outcomes.

You'll leave with practical tools, sample question sequences, and greater confidence to turn your community engagement sessions—from town halls to advisory committees—into meaningful conversations that powerfully inform decisions.

About Una McAlinden: Una is a certified facilitator and founder of Creative Strategy Solutions,



specializing in local government strategic planning and community engagement. She partners with city managers, administrators, department heads, and councils across Washington State to transform competing priorities and complex challenges into cohesive strategy. Her work has demonstrated how much depends on the quality of the conversations happening inside and outside the organization.

Grounded in Technology of Participation (ToP) methodology, Una designs and facilitates participatory processes that turn diverse perspectives into real decisions, especially in public-facing engagement where trust and inclusion matter most. She is the lead researcher behind the first study examining leadership team meeting effectiveness across Washington State municipal government, conducted in partnership with WCMA. Her facilitation work and her research point in the same direction: the right structure changes everything.

Una is an affiliate member of ICMA and WCMA and a regular presenter at WCMA conferences. She provides an annual community engagement workshop for the Northwest Women's Leadership Academy.



THE AI SURVIVAL GUIDE

Angie Carson + Jen Rittenhouse, SiteCrafting

Public information officers and government communicators are facing an impossible math problem: expectations are skyrocketing, but time, staff and budgets are shrinking. When you're drowning in public records requests, social media inquiries and agency updates, the siren song of AI shortcuts is almost impossible to resist.

But in public service, outsourcing your soul to a generic algorithm isn't just risky — it can destroy the community trust you've spent years

building. AI can't read the room during a crisis, and it certainly doesn't understand the nuance of your community's unique needs.

This session will help you understand how to draw a hard line between human intuition and machine efficiency. You'll learn how to establish strict guardrails, why generic AI is a public agency liability, and how custom, private tech solutions can handle the repetitive clutter so your team has the space to do the real, human work of public connection.

About Angie Carson: Angie is the Director of Strategy at SiteCrafting and helps organizations navigate complex digital chaos and turn big ideas into small, practical steps. As Director of Strategy at SiteCrafting, Angie leads digital strategy and technological integration for clients across a wide range of industries, including local and regional governments. Before her agency work, she managed high-stakes internal communications for a major regional health system, giving her firsthand experience with the compliance, rapid change, and communication challenges unique to public and enterprise institutions.

A graduate of Washington State University with a degree in Journalism and Public Relations, Angie specializes in building strategic digital frameworks that help teams keep pace with change while protecting organizational trust. When she is not architecting secure technology solutions, she enjoys spending time with her family, online shopping, and tackling overly ambitious DIY projects.

About Jen Rittenhouse: Jen is a journalist turned storyteller and brand builder whose career spans



decades and industries. As the Director of Brand and Marketing at SiteCrafting, Jen helps organizations discover their authentic voice and connect meaningfully with their communities. Her diverse background includes valuable experience on the marketing team for a major healthcare system, where she managed the public social media program and navigated high-stakes storytelling under strict regulatory standards.

Jen holds a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism and specializes in helping brands find the magic in their mission and translate it into impactful, human-first campaigns. A Pacific Northwest native, Jen is also a mom, a runner, a thrifter and firmly believes that public communication should have a soul.



GEN Z ISN'T READING YOUR PRESS RELEASE (AND THAT'S THE POINT)

Holly McPherson, Firmani + Associates

Here's the challenge: you can be credible and still get ignored. Gen Z is skeptical of official channels, while older generations still rely on traditional news and formal updates. One message, blasted across every platform, won't land with either group.

Today's communicators need to understand why different generations trust different sources, then build an integrated comms infrastructure that reaches all of them simultaneously. This session draws on research in intergenerational communications (the speaker's master's focus at Gonzaga) and real-world application across clients and organizations.

You'll learn:

- How generational trust patterns shape where information lands (and where it gets ignored or rejected)
- The PESO framework (Owned, Earned, Shared, Paid) as a structure that reaches multiple generations at once, not sequentially
- How E-E-A-T signals (Expertise, Experience, Authoritativeness, Trustworthiness) compound across channels when you think like a publisher, not a broadcaster
- Why earned media: third-party coverage, credible citations, independent validation, is the infrastructure that makes younger audiences trust you and builds search visibility for citizens looking for answers
- Practical applications: how to audit where different age cohorts are engaging, and what messaging infrastructure each needs

The stakes are real. If your agency can't be found in search or on social, people fill the gap with misinformation. This session shows how an integrated comms strategy closes generational trust gaps and builds the authority signals that today's information systems (search and AI) reward.

About Holly McPherson: Holly is an account manager at Firmani + Associates, a Seattle-based PR and marketing firm. She brings a background that spans Fortune 500 communications, non-profit communications, content strategy, morning radio, television, ethical AI implementation and video game development. With a focus on intergenerational communications, her experience captures a range that shapes how she thinks about reaching audiences who don't consume media the way they used to.



Holly holds a master's degree from the Communications Organizational Leadership department at Gonzaga University and a B.S. in Broadcasting from the University of Utah. She specializes in translating complex ideas into content that moves people, with a focus on the intersection of strategy, technology and storytelling.

When she's not crafting compelling campaigns, Holly is writing a book she'll perhaps finish one day, crocheting, listening to opera, designing websites or convincing anyone who will listen that making a proper grilled cheese is an underrated art form.



STARTING FROM ZERO (FOLLOWERS): BEGINNING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR SMALL TEAMS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Derek Gibson, PenMet Parks

Starting a social media is kind of like going to the gym. Some people know what they're doing, and they have big muscles to show for it. We look at those people and we think, "I wish I had those muscles, but I don't even know where to start."

When we do decide we're going to get those big muscles, we buy all the clothes, get some new protein powder and start going to the gym every day. This goes great for two or three weeks until we burn out and it all unravels. Then we're back at square one, not sure how to get those muscles.

This session is for small organizations who want to start a social media presence but don't know where to start. Consistency, quality content and an appropriate definition of success is how we push for meaningful growth. Attendees will leave with an understanding and toolkit on how to start, maintain and grow a social media presence even if they're a team of one.

About Derek Gibson: Derek is the Marketing Coordinator for Peninsula Metro Parks District. As Marketing Coordinator, he is responsible for social media management, photography/videography, print materials and traditional marketing (e-mail/ad placements) for the entire district. He believes firmly in creating media and content that is uniquely human.

Prior to working at PenMet, Derek began his career as the Communications Coordinator for the City of Lakewood. During his time there, he designed and implemented the city's first comprehensive brand guide. Those guardrails led to large communications success, including rapidly growing the city's social media following and building noticeable community trust.

Derek fell in love with Tacoma after moving across the state to attend Pacific Lutheran University, where he graduated with a B.A. in Strategic Communications. In addition to government communications, he is a passionate culture and music photographer. He has photographed up-and-coming local acts to nationally touring musicians and professional athletes. He loves skiing, biking, traveling and being outdoors.





WHAT KEEPS YOU UP AT NIGHT?

Jenny Weekes, Hartwood Communications

Every communicator has a challenge they're wrestling with—a difficult leader, limited resources, misinformation, community criticism, a looming crisis, or simply too much on their plate.

In this interactive session, you'll connect with peers facing similar challenges, share ideas, and learn practical solutions from communicators across the Pacific Northwest. Through guided discussion and facilitated problem-solving, you'll leave with fresh

perspectives, actionable ideas, and the reassurance that you're not navigating these challenges alone.

About Jenny Weekes: Jenny is the founder of the PNW Comms Summit and owner of Hartwood Communications, where she helps government agencies, public safety organizations, schools, and mission-driven organizations build communication strategies that create clarity, strengthen public trust, and prepare teams for both everyday communication and high-pressure moments.

With more than two decades of experience in public safety communications and executive leadership, Jenny has served as a public information officer, media spokesperson, and communications strategist. She is a graduate of FEMA's Executive Public Information Officer Program and has instructed FEMA's Basic Public Information Officer course since 2018.

Jenny is passionate about helping communicators move beyond simply creating content to becoming trusted advisors within their organizations.

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MICROPHONE: A PANEL DISCUSSION ABOUT WHAT JOURNALISTS WANT FROM COMMUNICATORS

Moderated by Chelsea Shepherd, Tacoma Fire Department

Step inside today's newsroom with a panel of local journalists as they share what helps—and hinders—effective media relationships. Gain candid insights into pitching stories, handling interviews, meeting deadlines, and building trust, then bring your questions for an interactive audience Q&A.

