



SOUTHERN PUBLIC RELATIONS FEDERATION

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

September 20-22, 2026
Tuscaloosa, Alabama

LEADERSHIP

2026 SPRF BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Sarah Clancy, APR, PRAL

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UAB REPRESENTATIVE

Bill Moak, APR

SILENT AUCTION

The SPRF Silent Auction proceeds go to the SPRF scholarships for college students. Get yourself some great merchandise while supporting our future colleagues.

- Include a cell phone number
- Bid increments must be in amounts of \$5 or more
- You must be present to accept your item or designate someone to pay and pick it up for you

LEADERSHIP

2026 SPRF CONFERENCE COMMITTEE

PRESIDENT-ELECT/CONFERENCE CHAIR

Ginger Guttner, APR, PRAL

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Tracy Sims, APR, PRCA

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Micah Walker, APR, PRAL

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Sarah Laborde, APR, PRAL

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Adam Kelley, APR, PRAM

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Lisa Frazier, APR, PRCA

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Krispin Nelson, PRCA

SILENT AUCTION CHAIR

Michelle Marcotte, PRAL

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Mikala McCurry, APR

DOOR PRIZES CHAIR AND PRAL PRESIDENT

Emerie Eck Holtzclaw

PRAM PRESIDENT

Morgan Shiyu

ECPRO PRESIDENT

Kathy Morrow

EVENT PLANNER AND SPRF ASSOCIATION ASSISTANT

Kayla Stefferud, PRAM

AGENDA AT A GLANCE

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 20

1 - 6 PM	REGISTRATION AND EXHIBITORS	
1 - 4 PM	PRE-CONFERENCE WORKSHOP: EMAIL AND TEXT MARKETING Sponsored by MailChimp and Covalent Logic Limited to 25 people	
2 - 4 PM	SPRF BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING	
4 - 5 PM	COUNCIL OF LEADERS MEETING	
6 - 8 PM	OPENING RECEPTION	Governor's Room

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 21

8 AM - 4 PM	REGISTRATION AND EXHIBITORS	
8 AM - 4 PM	SILENT AUCTION	Clay
8 - 9 AM	NETWORKING BREAKFAST	
9 - 10:30 AM	BUSINESS MEETING AND KEYNOTE GenZ and Me: Leading Tomorrow's Talent through Today's Generational Divide	
10:45 -11:45 AM	BREAKOUT A 1. APR Jump Start: The RPIE Process 2. Creating a Communication Strategy with Those Not in PR 3. Podcasting 101: How Two Government Podcasters Make It Work	
12 - 1:15 PM	HALL OF FAME LUNCH	
1:30 - 2:30 PM	BREAKOUT B 1. ADHD and ME: Maintaining Stakeholder Attention through Influence 2. Creating a Communication Strategy with Those Not in PR 3. The Robots are Coming for Your Clicks: How to Stay Relevant in AI-Driven World	

2:45 - 3:45 PM

BREAKOUT C

1. Strengthen Your Crisis Communication Roots with Mental Health Strategies
2. The Language of Discovery: Marketing Research in Engaging Ways
3. APR Jump Start: Applied PR Ethics and Law

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 22

9 - 10 AM

BREAKFAST AND INDUSTRY ROUNDTABLES

9 AM - 6 PM

SILENT AUCTION

Clay

10 - 11:15 AM

GENERAL SESSION

From Idea to Impact: Celebrating How Podcasting Connects Us to New and Wider Audiences

11:30 AM - 1 PM

RECOGNITION LUNCH

1:15 - 2:15 PM

BREAKOUT D

1. Strengthen Your Crisis Communication Roots with Mental Health Strategies
2. From 1 to 100 million: Transforming University Social Media into a National Media Platform
3. APR Jump Start: Leading the PR Function and Relationship Management

2:30 - 3:30 PM

BREAKOUT E

1. From 1 to 100 million: Transforming University Social Media into a National Media Platform
2. APR Jump Start: The Panel Presentation and Portfolio Review
3. Storytelling: The Soul of the City

5 - 6:30 PM

RECEPTION

Governor's Room

6:30 - 8:30 PM

LANTERN AWARDS AND DINNER

DETAILED AGENDA

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 20

1 - 6 PM

REGISTRATION AND EXHIBITORS

1 - 4 PM

PRE-CONFERENCE WORKSHOP: FOUNDATIONS IN EMAIL MARKETING Governor's Room

Sponsored by MailChimp and Covalent Logic

Limited to 25 people

Foundations in Email Marketing - 90 minutes

If you're new to email marketing and looking to understand the basics so you can effectively communicate with your audience, this workshop is for you. Or if you want to look at the fundamentals of audience building, list segmentation and building a great email. During this workshop, we will cover:

- Learning the basics of email marketing and how to communicate effectively with subscribers
- Tips on how craft an email that works for you
- Building and sending an email together in real-time
- Best practices for a successful email marketing strategy

Advanced Email Marketing: Make the most of text marketing & automatic customer journeys - 90 minutes

In today's world, customers expect real-time, personalized communication, an automated email and SMS process offers a direct, immediate way to engage audiences. Dive into the art of SMS marketing or elevate your SMS marketing skills and delve deeper into sophisticated strategies such as audience building, streamlined messaging, and the seamless integration of email and SMS. Get a practical foundation in Customer Journey Automation Flows. You'll learn how flows can work, how rules and actions shape the experience, and how to build and review a flow that's ready to activate.

2 - 4 PM

SPRF BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

4 - 5 PM

COUNCIL OF LEADERS MEETING

6 - 8 PM

OPENING RECEPTION

Governor's Room

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 21

8 AM - 4 PM **REGISTRATION AND EXHIBITORS**

8 AM - 4 PM **SILENT AUCTION**

Clay

8 - 9 AM **NETWORKING BREAKFAST**

9 - 10:30 AM **BUSINESS MEETING AND KEYNOTE**

Gayle Bagby Fitz

GenZ and Me: Leading Tomorrow's Talent through Today's Generational Divide

Dan Farkas

Everyone wants their business to branch out and their team's roots to grow. Why doesn't it happen? It's generational. Leaders now balance five generations of office influence in one messy generational sandwich: Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, Generation Z, and Zoomers. Gen Z and Me will help attendees cut through the clutter to find unity that grows teams and empowers talent. The roots of success will branch into past practices, timely innovation, and examples for any work setting. We'll then see how to measure success internally and externally.

10:45 -11:45 AM **BREAKOUT A**

APR Jump Start: The RPIE Process

President's Room

Lori Miller

Creating a Communication Strategy with Those Not in PR

Murphy

Angela Levins

A communication strategy is the backbone of any campaign. Creating that strategy doesn't just happen at your desk. The crafting of a communication strategy starts with talking to those involved in a project, and often those involved do not have a background in PR. So, how do you bridge the gap to create a successful communication strategy.

By end of session, attendees will have a stronger understanding of developing your communications strategy for a campaign with the help of project leaders. This includes developing goals, objectives, budget, timeline, and audience.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 21

- 10:45 -11:45 AM **Podcasting 101: How Two Government Podcasters Make It Work** Governor's Room
[Paul Wolf and Paul Katool](#)
Think government agencies aren't in the podcasting game? Think again! In this session, two podcasting professionals from the public sector will share their unique approaches to launching and managing a podcast - one with a full in-person studio setup and the other recording entirely remotely. Whether you're considering starting a podcast for your organization or just curious about the process, this discussion will cover the basics of audio production, equipment considerations, and practical tips for getting started. Walk away with the knowledge and confidence to turn your podcast idea into reality - no matter your budget or setup!
- 12 - 1:15 PM **HALL OF FAME LUNCH** Gayle Bagby Fitz
- 1:30 - 2:30 PM **BREAKOUT B**
ADHD and ME: Maintaining Stakeholder Attention through Influence Governor's Room
[Dan Farkas](#)
Attention is a precious commodity far too easily stolen. Fifty-seven (57) percent of Americans consider themselves "addicted" to their smartphones. Americans now spend over 4 hours and 25 minutes a day on their phones. The average person checks their phone 150 times a day. How do we reverse this flywheel? Attention to Influence. ADHD and Me will explain the science of dwindling attention. We'll then explain how the neuroscience of ADHD can help communicators reverse digital distraction without necessarily removing technology. We'll finally see how modern trends with influencer relations can help spark understanding, adoption, and meaningful engagement.
- 1:30 - 2:30 PM **Creating a Communication Strategy with Those Not in PR** Murphy
[Angela Levins](#)
A communication strategy is the backbone of any campaign. Creating that strategy doesn't just happen at your desk. The crafting of a communication strategy starts with talking to those involved in a project, and often those involved do not have a background in PR. So, how do you bridge the gap to create a successful communication strategy.
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MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 21

1:30 - 2:30 PM

The Robots are Coming for Your Clicks: How to Stay Relevant in AI-Driven World

President's Room

[Robin McKinney](#)

Search is no longer just about rankings. AI platforms like ChatGPT and Google's AI Overviews now generate answers that shape brand perception without users ever clicking a link. This session explains how AI-driven search works and why public relations plays a critical role in brand discoverability. Attendees will learn how strong PR foundations — credible content, authority, and strategic messaging — directly influence whether their brand appears in AI-generated answers. Participants will leave with practical strategies they can immediately apply to strengthen brand visibility, credibility, and influence in AI-mediated search environments.

2:45 - 3:45 PM

BREAKOUT C

Strengthen Your Crisis Communication Roots with Mental Health Strategies

Governor's Room

[J. Suzanne Horsley, Ph.D.](#) and [Stephanie Pettis, APR, CPRC](#)

Strengthen Your Crisis Communication Roots with Mental Health Strategies
Experienced PR professionals know the value of key communication principles, such as situational awareness, environmental scanning and stakeholder listening. They have crisis communication plans to guide them when things go wrong. But how many employ strategies that identify and address emotional distress among their stakeholders when a crisis hits? This session demonstrates how a trauma-informed approach to crisis communication can support the emotional and mental health needs of your team while also supporting message development and engagement with external stakeholders. The speakers will share resources to complement crisis PR strategies and identify signs that you or your colleagues need support.

2:45 - 3:45 PM

APR Jump Start: Applied PR Ethics and Law

President's Room

[Lisa Frazier, APR](#)

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 21

2:45 - 3:45 PM

The Language of Discovery: Marketing Research in Engaging Ways

Murphy

[Karyn Brown](#), [Sam Kealhofer](#), and [Sarah Nicholas](#)

Effective research communication requires more than translating technical findings—it requires storytelling, context, and genuine connection. This session explores practical strategies for making scholarship resonate with broader audiences. Participants will learn how to highlight the human motivations and personal journeys behind research, connect discoveries to current events, and present complex ideas through accessible narratives. The session also examines multi-platform engagement, including news releases, magazine features, podcasts, and broadcast interviews. Finally, it offers examples of informal, community-centered events that invite dialogue between researchers and audiences. Together, these approaches help transform research communication from one-way dissemination into meaningful, memorable public engagement.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 22

9 - 10 AM

BREAKFAST AND INDUSTRY ROUNDTABLES

9 AM - 6 PM

SILENT AUCTION

Clay

10 - 11:15 AM

GENERAL SESSION

Gayle Bagby Fitz

From Idea to Impact: Celebrating How Podcasting Connects Us to New and Wider Audiences

[Rebecca Todd Minder](#)

Learn how mission-driven podcasting expands reach and engages younger audiences. This session covers the journey from concept to execution, sharing real-world successes, failures, and surprises. Attendees will gain practical strategies to build authentic connections, avoid common pitfalls, and grow their digital presence through actionable, experience-based guidance.

11:30 AM - 1 PM

RECOGNITION LUNCH

Gayle Bagby Fitz

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 22

1:15 - 2:15 PM

BREAKOUT D

Strengthen Your Crisis Communication Roots with Mental Health Strategies

Governor's Room

[J. Suzanne Horsley, Ph.D. and Stephanie Pettis, APR, CPRC](#)

Strengthen Your Crisis Communication Roots with Mental Health Strategies
Experienced PR professionals know the value of key communication principles, such as situational awareness, environmental scanning and stakeholder listening. They have crisis communication plans to guide them when things go wrong. But how many employ strategies that identify and address emotional distress among their stakeholders when a crisis hits? This session demonstrates how a trauma-informed approach to crisis communication can support the emotional and mental health needs of your team while also supporting message development and engagement with external stakeholders. The speakers will share resources to complement crisis PR strategies and identify signs that you or your colleagues need support.

1:15 - 2:15 PM

From 1 to 100 million: Transforming University Social Media into a National Media Platform

Murphy

[Thomas Broadu and Sarah Triplett](#)

Mississippi State University transformed its social media from a traditional news outlet into a high performing digital storytelling engine, generating 132 million organic impressions and rising more than 150 spots to No. 13 nationally in engagement rankings. With zero paid media, a two person team leveraged research driven strategy, authentic campus storytelling, and platform specific video optimization to double follower growth goals and achieve \$4.6 million in earned media value. This session outlines the research, planning, execution, and evaluation framework that fueled measurable, national impact through organic, algorithm aligned content.

APR Jump Start: Leading the PR Function and Relationship Management

President's Room

[Mikala McCurry](#)

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 22

2:30 - 3:30 PM

BREAKOUT E

From 1 to 100 million: Transforming University Social Media into a National Media Platform

Murphy

[Thomas Broadu and Sarah Triplett](#)

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APR Jump Start: APR Q&A Panel

President's Room

[Mikala McCurry and Susan Poole, APR](#)

2:30 - 3:30 PM

Storytelling: The Soul of the City

Governor's Room

[Paul Wolf](#)

Every PR professional knows the challenge: your organization has a compelling story, but the loudest headlines aren't yours to write. In this breakout session, Paul Wolf of Visit Jackson shares how a disciplined, storytelling-first content strategy can help communications teams reclaim the narrative, build audience trust, and create content that actually moves people. Drawing on real campaigns from one of the South's most misunderstood cities, Paul walks attendees through a practical framework for producing content that spreads organically across channels. From emotionally resonant community profiles to interactive audience engagement campaigns and consistent brand-building, every example is grounded in work that had a measurable impact. PR pros will leave with seven actionable principles for strengthening their content practice. Whether you're communicating for a destination, a brand, a nonprofit, or a public agency, the storytelling fundamentals are the same, and this session will show you how to put them to work.

5 - 6:30 PM

RECEPTION

Governor's Room

6:30 - 8:30 PM

LANTERN AWARDS AND DINNER

SPRF MEMBER BENEFITS

As a member of the Southern Public Relations Federation, we trust your membership is valuable. Our goal is to enhance this value yearly. We want to remind you of your member benefits, including:

- Professional Code of Ethics
- Online membership database with extensive networking opportunities
- Annual conference
- Professional development webinars
- Opportunity to earn Accreditation in Public Relations (APR)
- Accreditation subsidies
- Professional resource library
- Membership survey data
- Representation on the Universal Accreditation Board (UAB)
- Local, state, and regional leadership opportunities
- Exclusive SPRF news, information, and job openings
- Chapter use of Open Water and other association tools
- Awards with professional feedback

STATES AND CHAPTERS

[Emerald Coast Public Relations Organization](#)

[Public Relations Association of Louisiana](#)

- PRAL Baton Rouge
- PRAL Central
- PRAL Northwest

[Public Relations Council of Alabama](#)

- PRCA Birmingham
- PRCA East Alabama
- PRCA Mobile
- PRCA Montgomery
- PRCA North Alabama
- PRCA West Alabama

[Public Relations Association of Mississippi](#)

- PRAM Central
- PRAM Gulf Coast
- PRAM Mississippi Beach
- PRAM Northeast
- PRAM Oxford/Ole Miss
- PRAM Pine Belt
- PRAM River City
- PRAM Starkville/MSU