



2026 MPELRA SUMMER CONFERENCE

AUGUST 5-7, 2026

IN-PERSON: Wood Lake Meeting Center, Rochester MN

VIRTUAL: VIA TEAMS

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 5

11:00 am **Registration Desk Opens**

Lunch will be provided at the Wood Lake Meeting Center beginning at 11:00 am.

The virtual link will be sent in advance, as well as technology tips for the best virtual experience.

12:20 pm **Welcome**

Jenn Worthington, MPELRA President, Deputy HR Director, Dept of Human Services / Human Resources Director, Office of Governor Tim Walz & Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan

12:30 – 2:00 pm **Back to Basics Session – You Don't Have to Be a Numbers Person: A Practical, Less Stress Guide to Costing Labor Contracts**

Labor contract costing can feel intimidating, especially for professionals who don't work with Excel every day. Participants will learn tricks for estimating costs, dealing with non-wage proposals unions use to muddy the financial waters, and streamlining the costing process without overcomplicating the math.

Ryan Gruber: City of St. Paul

2:00 – 2:15 pm **Break**

2:15 – 4:00 pm **Behind the Curtain: How the State of Minnesota Bargains**

Step inside the State of Minnesota's collective bargaining process and discover how negotiations take shape. This session will walk through how Minnesota Management & Budget's Labor Relations team prepares for bargaining with its twelve bargaining units, including how proposals are developed, how input is gathered from agencies, HR partners, and leadership, and how priorities are set. We'll also explore the strategies used to work toward voluntary settlement agreements that support both the State's mission and its workforce.

Jennifer Ziegler, Labor Relations Director, Minnesota Management & Budget

4:15 pm – **Check In to Hotels**

5:15 – 9:00 pm – **Networking Event at Four Daughters Vineyard & Winery**

The buses will depart Wood Lake Meeting Center at 5:15 pm to arrive at Four Daughters by 6 pm. Dinner and drinks will be served. The buses will depart at 8:30 pm for arrival back by 9 pm.

THURSDAY AUGUST 6

7:30 – 8:45 am **Breakfast at the Wood Lake Meeting Center**

8:45 – 9:00 am **Welcome from the National PELRA President**

Aundrea Cordle, Fairfield County Administrator - Ohio, NPELRA President

9:00 – 11:45 am (including break) **The Persuasion Flywheel**

Labor negotiations are not just exchanges of proposals; they are high-stakes conversations where trust, timing, evidence, and message discipline shape outcomes. This session introduces the Persuasion Flywheel, a practical framework that helps negotiators turn technical proposals into compelling narratives that decision-makers, bargaining teams, and stakeholders can understand and support. Built around four connected principles—Framing, Credibility, Empathy, and Evidence—the session blends research-backed negotiation concepts with real-world public-sector bargaining experience. Participants will explore how to align proposals with shared interests, build trust and executive presence, anticipate resistance, and strengthen arguments with data and story. Participants will leave with practical tools they can immediately apply at the bargaining table—no legalese required.

Holland Atkinson, Chief Labor Relations Officer, Hennepin County

11:45 am to 1:00 pm **Lunch at the Wood Lake Meeting Center**

1:00 – 1:45 pm **Follow-up On Paid Leave MPL Is Now In Effect. How Is It Working?**

A panel of people using the state plan and 3rd-party plans will talk about their experiences, what has



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worked, what hasn't, and what the legislature has done to change anything.

Panel Members: Lori Pawelk, Assistant HR Director for Wright County; Barb Lamfers, Benefits Technician from St. Louis Park; Allie Michka, Payroll Manager from the Metropolitan Airports Commission; and Stacie Thomas, MN Dept of Corrections

1:45 pm – 2:00 pm **Break**

2:00 – 3:00 pm – **MN Paid leave Panel Discussion Continued**

3:00 – 3:15 pm – Break

3:15 – 4:45 pm – **First Amendment Speech and Social Media**

This timely presentation will address the legal landscape governing public employee speech and the First Amendment, particularly in the context of social media. The presenters will provide practical guidance and tips for public employers based on real-life cases, including one case they successfully tried before a federal jury last summer.

Katie Lynch – Senior Attorney & Kelly Pierce – Attorney Civil Division, Hennepin County Attorney's Office

5:00 - 7:00 pm **Networking at The Wood Lake Meeting Center**

FRIDAY, AUGUST 7

8:00 – 9:00 am **Breakfast at The Wood Lake Meeting Center**

9:00 – 10:00 am **Labor and Employment Legislative Update**

The 2026 Minnesota legislative session began on February 17 and lasted just 12 weeks, but being an election year, it was full of high-stakes political drama and policy debates. Join us for a legislative update by Owen Wirth, League of Minnesota Cities Intergovernmental Relations Representative, as he reviews the stakes of the session, major accomplishments and impasses, and labor/employment law changes.

Owen Wirth, Intergovernmental Relations, League of MN Cities

10:00 – 10:15 am **Break**

10:15 am- 12:00 pm **Depolarizing the Workplace**

In this polarized time, employees lack skills for listening carefully, looking for common ground and sharing perspectives in ways that connect rather than create more misunderstanding. In this session, you'll learn tools for mediating between employees who differ politically and help them listen and share in a way that others might hear – even if they disagree.

Christopher Schoenherr is a Braver Angels workshop moderator. Braver Angels inspires and equips Americans to practice "courageous citizenship" to build trust across political differences.

12:00 pm **Conference Close**

Thank You For Attending!

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

National PELRA's CLRP, our Summer Conference program is worth 5 Recertification Credits. Our Winter Conference is worth 3 Recertification Credits.

[CLRP Recertification Program](https://npelra.org) (npelra.org)

If your CLRP certification has lapsed, I'd encourage you to immediately contact the National's Customer Service email and ask what, if anything, can be done.

If you've been issued a Credly badge for your CLRP, go out and claim it.

HR recertification credits - They can still get credit for the conference by entering data into the SHRM or HRCI portal.



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Future MPELRA Conferences

February 4, 2027 – Winter Conference
Crowne Plaza Minneapolis West, Plymouth, MN

August 11-13, 2027 – Summer Conference
Breezy Point Resort, Breezy Point, MN

February 3, 2028 – Winter Conference
Crowne Plaza Minneapolis West, Plymouth, MN

August 2-4, 2028: Summer Conference
Treasure Island, Welch, MN



Future National PELRA Conferences

April 11-14, 2027 - Fort Worth, TX

April 9-12, 2028- San Diego, CA



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REGISTRATION INSTRUCTIONS

REGISTRATION: Click [HERE](#) to register via National PELRA.

- ✓ Expert-led sessions and conference handouts
- ✓ Breakfasts, snacks, and lunches (conference attendees only)
- ✓ Wednesday night event with after-hours dinner and reception event (included for in-person conference attendees)
 - Register the number of guests you'd like to bring when completing your conference registration. Only \$50 per guest for the events, outdoor reception, and drinks
- ✓ Thursday evening reception

If you have any problem with your conference registration, please contact the National PELRA team at customerservice@npelra.org (Courtney) or educate@npelra.org (Kelsia); 858-299-3150 x200 or x300.

MEMBER

Virtual conference rate (must be registered by 7/24/26).....\$200

In-person conference Early Bird rate (by 7/17/26).....\$300

Standard In-person Rate (on/after 7/18/26 until 7/24/26)....\$400

NON-MEMBER*

(*Must be eligible for membership per National PELRA by-laws.)

Virtual conference rate (must be registered by 7/24/26).....\$400

Standard In-person Rate (must be registered by 7/24/26)\$500

If you are a non-member, please consider joining! Membership information and application can be found [here](#).

All registration options will close on 7/24/2026, and no late registrations will be allowed!

Cancellation: A \$50 administrative fee will be charged for all cancellations. **All cancellations received after 8/1/26 are non-refundable.** No-shows are non-refundable. One registration transfer is allowed per registration, and transfers must have the same membership status or fees will be adjusted accordingly. All cancellation requests must be emailed in writing to educate@npelra.org



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LODGING

Lodging is available at a variety of local hotels. Details for each location are noted below.

EVEN Hotels by IHG: Reserved lodging is limited, and the MPELRA room block will be released on **7/15/26**. The lodging rate is \$134 (king rooms), plus tax and parking. Rates will be available 3 days prior to the event and 3 days after. This location is approximately 6 miles from the event center at 101 11th Ave. SW | Rochester, Minnesota 55902 | Phone: 507-258-2323. Online reservations can be made using the link [here](#). Cancellation fees may apply.

Hotel Indigo: Reservations can be made by calling 507-252-8200 and letting them know you are with the MPELRA Conference. Lodging is limited, and the MPELRA room block will be released on **7/8/26 at noon**. Room rates range from \$129 to \$139 per night. The hotel is approximately 6 miles from the event center and is located at 220 South Broadway Avenue | Rochester, Minnesota 55904 | Phone: 507-252-8200. Cancellation fees may apply.

Homewood Suites: Reservations can be made [online](#). Lodging is limited, and the MPELRA room block will be released on **7/16/26**. Room rates range from \$127 per night. The hotel is approximately 6 miles from the event center and is located at 165 13th Avenue SW | Rochester, Minnesota 55902 | Phone: 507-218-3320. Cancellation fees may apply.