



2026 Annual Training Conference Agenda

September 16 – 18, 2026

Grand Traverse Resort and Spa, 100 Grand Traverse Village Blvd., Acme, MI

Pieces of the Whole

— EVERY PIECE MATTERS —

Wednesday, September 16, 2026

12 Noon First-Time Attendees'/New Members' Orientation

12 Noon Conference Registration Opens

1:45 p.m. President's Welcome

2:00 p.m. **By Design, Not Default: How Intentional Partnerships Can Transform Organizational Culture**

Jerome Threlkeld, Organizational Development Coordinator & Jared Field, Director of Communications, County of Genesee

What does your organization stand for — and do employees experience those values every day?

In this engaging session, participants will explore how culture is shaped through leadership behaviors, workplace policies, communication, and accountability — not mission statements alone. This session goes beyond theory to showcase what intentional culture-building looks like in practice. Participants will examine the key drivers of a healthy culture and learn how gaps between stated values and daily experiences can erode employee trust, credibility, and organizational effectiveness. Attendees will leave with actionable ideas for fostering alignment, strengthening culture, and turning organizational values into meaningful — and measurable — action.

3:30 p.m. **First Responders and Beyond: A Path Toward Resilient and Supportive Workplaces**

Todd Witthuhn, Human Resources and Labor Relations Deputy Director, County of Genesee

This session explores how high-impact, high-stress events shape the emotional and organizational landscape for first responders and what all workplaces can learn from these experiences. The session highlights the realities of repeated exposure to trauma and the importance of trauma-informed care. We will examine practical support structures such as Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) teams, debriefs, peer counseling, and after-action reviews, then broaden the lens to understand how trauma also affects non-first responder employees. Leaders will learn how to recognize compassion fatigue, support their teams, and build resilient workplaces.

Wednesday, September 16, 2026 *continued*

- 5:00 p.m. President's Reception
- 6:15 p.m. Dinner and an Evening of Fun

Thursday, September 17, 2026

- 8:00 a.m. Conference Registration
- MPELRA Buffet Breakfast

9:00 a.m. **Employment Law Update**

Rhonda R. Stowers, Partner, Plunkett Cooney

Stay informed on the latest employment law developments affecting public employers. This session will examine recent court decisions and legal developments in the context of workplace policies, personnel decisions, compliance responsibilities, and risk prevention. Attendees will gain a clearer understanding of how these changes may impact day-to-day operations and how to respond with confidence.

10:15 a.m. **Grievance Handling and Arbitration: From the Basics to Avoiding Costly Mistakes**

Andre' L. Poplar, J.D., Vice Chancellor for Human Resources, Oakland Community College

Grievance handling and arbitration can carry significant consequences when not managed carefully. This practical session will provide an overview of best practices for effective grievance administration and arbitration, while highlighting common missteps that can lead to unnecessary risk, cost, and workplace disruption. Attendees will gain useful strategies for managing grievances, preparing for arbitration, and making informed decisions at each stage of the process.

- 12:15 p.m. MPELRA Luncheon

1:15 p.m. **From ChatGPT to Compliance: AI in Everyday HR Decisions**

Cameron D. Ritsema, Esq., Member, Bodman, PLC

This practical session will explore the growing use of artificial intelligence in everyday HR and employment decisions. Attendees will learn how generative AI tools are being used in the workplace, where legal and compliance risks may arise, and why clear policies are essential for responsible use. The session will also offer guidance for reducing organizational exposure from informal AI adoption while helping HR professionals make informed decisions about emerging technology.

Thursday, September 17, 2026 *continued*

2:30 p.m. **HR Administration in a Union Environment**

Aaron D. Graves, Esq., Member, Bodman, PLC

This session will provide practical guidance for HR professionals working in a union environment, with a focus on building effective labor-management relationships and communicating clearly with union representatives and employees. Topics will include understanding and addressing past practice, applying appropriate discipline standards, managing grievances, and recognizing the importance of consistency in contract administration. Attendees will gain strategies for reducing conflict, supporting sound decision-making, and strengthening day-to-day HR administration in a unionized workplace.

5:30 p.m. Reception

6:30 p.m. Banquet

8:00 p.m. An Evening of Entertainment

Friday, September 18, 2026

8:00 a.m. Annual Business Meeting – Election of Officers, Annual Reports
MPELRA Buffet Breakfast

9:00 a.m. **Unbundling Health Insurance Benefits: Pooling and Healthcare Solutions**

Jonathon Trionfi, CEBS®, Partner, Plante Moran Group Benefit Advisors

This session will examine how public employers can evaluate and unbundle the components of a health insurance plan to support more effective risk pooling and healthcare solutions. Attendees will learn how these strategies may help control costs, improve plan flexibility, and support long-term benefit planning while operating within the parameters of Public Act 152. The discussion will provide practical considerations for assessing current benefit structures and identifying opportunities for more sustainable healthcare purchasing.

10:15 a.m. **MERC Update**

Marshall W. Grate, Esq., Member, Clark Hill, PLC

This MERC-focused update will break down recent case law into clear, practical takeaways for professionals involved in labor relations and workplace administration. The session will highlight significant rulings, identify emerging patterns in Commission decisions, and connect those developments to real-world bargaining, discipline, representation, and compliance issues. Participants will leave better prepared to recognize MERC-related risks and apply current guidance within their organizations.

11:45 a.m. Prize Drawing *(You must be present to win!)*

12 Noon Adjourn