



## 2025 Training Conference Agenda

Sunday, August 24 - Wednesday, August 27

Clearwater Beach, Florida

### Day 1—Sunday, August 24th

**8:00am-4:00pm** Conference Check-in

**10:00am-11:30am** **NIOA 101**

Are you a new member of NIOA? Is this your first conference? Do you want to know more about the organization? This special session is just for you! Every year, around 40% of conference attendees are first timers and we want to make sure you feel part of the family. NIOA President Stewart Smith, along with some special guests, will give you an overview of our organization and the conference and where to go and what to do while you are in Clearwater Beach. You will also have an opportunity to network with the other new members and your leadership. While this session is not required, it is highly recommended for first-time attendees and new members.

**11:30am-1:00pm** Lunch (on your own)

**1:00pm-2:30pm** **Session A: Basic PIO**

This interactive session is designed for new Public Information Officers seeking to build a solid foundation in public communication. Participants will explore the core responsibilities of a PIO, including managing media relations, crafting clear and compelling messages, and navigating crisis communications. By the end of this session, new PIOs will gain confidence in their roles, equipped with the practical skills and insights necessary to support their organizations and communities during both routine and critical situations. Join us to kick-start your career as a proficient and trusted Public Information Officer. Instructors for this session will be Jason Elmore, past president, Stewart Smith, current NIOA president and secretary Anna Huffman.

#### **Session B: The Executive Communications Advisor**

Communications professionals have been fighting for a seat at the executive command table for decades. Slowly, bosses are beginning to recognize the value of the communications pro - you are not simply "the PIO" or "media person" you should be striving to be the *strategic advisor* to your chief executive. What does it take to be in that role and taken seriously? In this session, former NIOA President Judy Pal, will explain what your executive needs from you, how you can best serve in an advisory capacity, and tactics for being heard at the table.



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### Day 1—Sunday, August 24th (continued)

**2:30pm-2:45pm**

Break

**2:45pm-4:15pm**

#### **Session A: Master Your On-Camera Presence**

Are you looking to sharpen your on-camera skills or refresh your approach as a spokesperson? Join two seasoned strategic communications managers for an interactive training session designed to help you deliver clear, confident, and effective messages in press briefings, crisis situations, and media interviews. Led by long-time NIOA members Chelsea Kretz of the Fort Worth Police Department and Amanda McNew of the Grapevine Police Department, this session will provide hands-on opportunities to handle tough questions with confidence, maintain composure under pressure, and master key messaging strategies. Through real-world scenarios, live camera exercises, and personalized feedback, you'll refine your public communication skills, enhance your credibility, and build stronger connections with the media and the public.

#### **Session B: Getting it 'Write': Reaching the right audience with the right words**

Adam Myrick from the Lexington County Sheriff's Department in SC, will discuss how the written word is the foundation of all communication. Whether you're writing a social media post, a news release or talking points...your words have to be easy-to-read and understand. This practical session serves up tips to equip you to cut through the noise with well-written copy that's concise, conversational and – most importantly – it won't sound like it was written by a government employee.

**4:15pm-5:00pm**

Regional Meetings

**6:30pm-7:30pm**

President's Social



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### Day 2—Monday, August 25th

**7:30am-8:30am** Breakfast (provided by NIOA)

**8:30am-9:00am** **Opening Ceremonies**

**9:00am-9:15am** Break—Region 5 & 10 photos

**9:15am-10:30am** **TBA**

**10:30am-10:45am** **Vendor Introductions (3)**

**10:45am-11:45am** **Creating a Crisis Communication Plan**

In the aftermath of the Uvalde, Texas, active shooter incident, the Department of Justice's Critical Incident Review emphasized the urgent need for law enforcement agencies to develop comprehensive Crisis Communication Plans. But where do you begin, and how can you ensure your plan is both effective and up to date? Amanda McNew from the Grapevine Texas Police Department will break down the essential components of a Crisis Communication Plan, outline best practices for integration within your agency, and establish guidelines for regular updates. Participants will leave with a practical checklist to build or refine their plan, ensuring their agency is prepared to communicate effectively in a crisis.

**1:45am-12:00pm** **Candidate Introductions**

**12:00pm-1:30pm** Lunch (on your own)

**1:30pm-1:45pm** **Vendor Introductions (3)**

**1:45pm- 3:00pm** **Seat at the Table – Turning Critics Into Cheerleaders**

We all have them. Naysayers. Haters. Trolls. Whatever you want to call them, most PIOs deal regularly with people online who love to hate your organization. Sometimes they even show up in person to the police lobby, community events, or your local council meeting. How do you manage them? Ignore them? Hope they go away? Decide they don't matter? The City of St. Cloud, Florida, has had notable success in converting some of its harshest critics into some of its most vocal cheerleaders. Join Communications Director Maryemma Bachelder and City Manager Veronica Miller for this robust conversation about how these gadflies can become assets. (Spoiler Alert: The PIO has to have a seat at the table. But then what?)



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### Day 2—Monday, August 25th (continued)

**3:00pm-3:15pm**      **Vendor Introductions (3)**

**3:15pm-3:30pm**      Break – Regions 8 & 9 Photos

**3:30pm-5:00pm**      **Maui Misinformation – Strategic Communication Response to the Maui Fires**

On August 8, 2023, wildfires on the Hawaiian Island of Maui, fueled by extremely high winds from a Pacific hurricane, killed more than 100 people and destroyed most of the town of Lahaina. Officers from the Maui police department found themselves responding to chaos as people attempted to evacuate amidst the raging and spreading flames, impassable roads, thick smoke and confusing false information. It was a nightmarish Hell for the residents and the police officers on that day and in the weeks that followed, even as work continued to identify all of those who perished in the fire and notify their families. Alana Pico, the Maui Police Department's Public Information Officer and Educational Specialist, is traveling to Clearwater to present a moving account of her department's response to the fire disaster and its work in battling persistent negative untruths about her agency.



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### Day 3—Tuesday, August 26th

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| <b>7:30am-8:30am</b>   | Breakfast (provided by NIOA)  |
| <b>8:30am-10:00am</b>  | <b>A Tale of Two Cities: Crisis communication put to the test</b><br><br>A deadly ramming attack in the French Quarter of New Orleans was carried out before dawn on New Year's Day. Two thousand miles away and just over five hours later, an Elon Musk signature Cybertruck detonated outside of the Trump International Hotel in Las Vegas. In the early hours, questions swirled. Connected or coincidence? Terrorism or criminal? John Miller explores a critical examination of two different approaches to crisis communication.            |
| <b>10:00am-10:15am</b> | Break – Regions 1 & 3 Photos  |
| <b>10:15am-11:30am</b> | <b>Canva 2.0</b><br><br>Last year, Anndrea Harris from Whoann Creative introduced us to Canva. This year she will give us an update on what's new with this platform. This engaging presentation will allow you to discover how Canva can work for you and your agency.   |
| <b>11:30am-11:45am</b> | <b>Business Meeting/Election</b>  |
| <b>11:45am-1:00pm</b>  | Lunch (on your own)   |
| <b>1:00pm-1:05pm</b>   | <b>Election Results</b>   |
| <b>1:05pm-2:30pm</b>   | <b>Safeguarding Public Trust: The legitimacy hazards of AI-generated content</b><br><br>Europol estimates that by 2025, 90% of social media content will be synthetically generated. What does that mean for government and public safety when trust is at an all-time low? In this session, former NIOA President Judy Pal will give you a better understanding of how AI is affecting people's perceptions and opinions and learn about the five things you can do today, to help protect yourself from an AI-generated false narrative tomorrow. |
| <b>2:30pm- 2:45pm</b>  | Break – Region 4 Photo  |



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### **Day 3—Tuesday, August 26th (continued)**

**2:45pm-4:15pm**

#### **Supporting Our Own: Caring for the Mental Health of Public Information Officers**

Public Information Officers (PIOs) face immense pressure as the bridge between agencies, the media, and the public—often during high-stress, traumatic events. This presentation by Wendy Norris from the Texas LODD Task Force will provide practical strategies for recognizing and addressing the unique mental health challenges PIOs experience. Participants will learn tools for stress management, resilience-building, and peer support, ensuring they can continue to serve effectively while prioritizing their own well-being.

**4:15pm-5:00pm**

#### **Subgroups/Networking**

**7:00pm-9:30pm**

#### **Karaoke**



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### Day 4—Wednesday, August 27th

**7:30am-8:30am** Breakfast (provided by NIOA)

**8:30am- 9:15am** Awards

**9:15am-10:00am** **Storms of the Century: Sarasota County's Unprecedented 2024 Hurricane Season**

The 2024 hurricane season brought unprecedented challenges to Sarasota County, Florida, with three major storms—Hurricanes Debby, Helene, and Milton—impacting the area within 70 days. Following a severe June flooding event, these storms delivered record-breaking rainfall, destructive storm surge, and a direct hit from a Category 3 hurricane. Despite the devastation, Sarasota County's proactive planning, emergency response, and 24/7 communications efforts helped protect residents and minimize impacts. Join Sarasota County Government Communications Director Jamie Carson and Public Information and Community Outreach Manager Genevieve Judge as they share key lessons from this historic season. From real-time updates and evacuation messaging to crisis communication strategies (and their go-to caffeine choices), this session will provide practical takeaways to help communities prepare for and respond to major disasters.

**10:00am-10:15am** Break – Regions 6 & 7 Photos

**10:15am-11:15am** **When the Storm Hits: Communicating Through Crisis at Every Level**

Hurricanes don't just leave physical devastation in their wake—they challenge the very foundation of crisis communication, collaboration, and public trust. In the past year, these storms tested public information officers (PIOs) across our region like never before, requiring an unprecedented level of coordination between local, state, and deployed communicators. This session offers a unique, inside look at hurricane response from three critical perspectives: local PIOs navigating disasters in their own communities, those deployed to assist in unfamiliar territory, and state and federal leaders overseeing large-scale coordination. Through an in-depth presentation and panel discussion, we'll explore the real-time challenges, successes, and lessons learned from those who were on the front lines of information management when their communities needed them most. Join (Mary) Kate Amaral from the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency and Brandon Smith from the Putnam County EMA for an insightful conversation that not only reflects on the past but also prepares us for the future of disaster communication.





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### Day 4—Wednesday, August 27th (continued)

11:15am-12:45pm	Lunch
12:45pm-2:00pm	TBA
2:00pm-2:15pm	Break
2:15pm-3:15pm	<b>Everything you need to know to achieve your mission objective with Nextdoor</b> In this informative session, Joseph Porcelli, Nextdoor's Global Public Agency and Crisis Response Lead, will provide product updates, discuss best practices to enhance reach and engagement, and explain how you can measure the actions or behaviors your neighbors took due to your communications on Nextdoor.
3:15pm-4:15pm	<b>Informing, Involving, and Inspiring: The PIO's Role in Community Engagement</b> Public Information Officers do more than relay information—they have the power to build trust, foster relationships, and create meaningful connections between their agencies and the communities they serve. Kendra Loney from the Nashville Fire Department, will explore strategies for going beyond traditional public safety messaging to engage audiences in impactful ways. From launching successful campaigns to amplifying initiatives that matter, attendees will learn how to leverage their role to inform, involve, and inspire their communities.
4:15pm-5:00pm	<b>Board Swearing-In</b>
6:30pm-7:30pm	<b>Closing Reception</b>

