

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR PRESIDING JUDGES AND COURT EXECUTIVE OFFICERS

Tenth Annual Trial Court Leadership Academy and Conference “250 Years of Judicial Independence and Adapting Justice to a New Century”

August 16–19, 2026

[Chase Center on the Riverfront](#)

815 Justinson Street
Wilmington, Delaware 19801

AGENDA

SUNDAY, AUGUST 16th

12:00 PM to 5:00 PM

Registration and Conference Information
[Information Desk](#)

2:00 PM to 4:00 PM

NAPCO Board Meeting
[Pusey & Jones Room](#)

NAPCO’s Board of Directors meets twice during the Annual Meeting. In Delaware, the initial Directors’ Meeting will be held on Sunday, August 16th from 2:00 PM to 4:00 PM and the second Directors’ Meeting will take place on Wednesday, August 19th from 7:00 AM – 8:00 AM.

5:30 to 7:30 PM

Welcome Reception
[Christina Ballroom](#)

Attire is business casual. Wilmington, DE weather in late August average is 85° F during the day, and 68° F in the evening.

6:00 to 6:30 PM

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Christina Ballroom

Hon. John J. Russo, NAPCO Board of Directors, Chair
John Bello, NAPCO Executive Director
Hon. Eric M. Davis, NAPCO Board of Directors, President
Lisa M. Robinson, NAPCO Board of Directors, Vice President

7:30 PM

Dinner on Your Own

Suggestions and directions to numerous restaurants, cafes and bistros near the hotel will be provided on the conference app.

By Appointment

“The Doctor Is In” Program

The National Center for State Courts provides a special on-site service at various national, regional, and state judicial/court management conferences to speak with one or more of NCSC’s court service professionals on any desired court topic regarding advice, problems, or assistance from the Center. There is no charge or further obligation. Center consultants will be available throughout the Conference on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. Prior to the Conference, send an email to Nikiesha Cosby at ncosby@ncsc.org to arrange an appointment.

MONDAY, AUGUST 17th

ACADEMY DAY

7:30 AM to 4:30 PM

Registration and Conference Information

Information Desk

7:30 to 8:30 AM

Breakfast

Christina Ballroom

8:30 to 9:00 AM

OPENING CEREMONIES

Riverfront Ballroom

Introductory Remarks

Hon. John J. Russo, NAPCO Board of Directors, Chair
Presentation of the Gordon “Gordy” Griller Award

Conference Agenda and Announcements

John Bello, NAPCO Executive Director

Overview of the Interactive Leadership Day Program, Learning Objectives, and Introduction of the Faculty

Hon. John J. Russo, NAPCO Board of Directors, Chair

John Bello, NAPCO Executive Director

9:00 AM to 4:30 PM

LEADERSHIP ACADEMY DAY

Riverfront Ballroom

Suzanne Peterson, Ph.D.

The Challenges of Judicial Leadership: Building Trust, Inspiring Teams, and Navigating Constant Change

The judiciary is facing challenges unlike any in recent memory. This Academy Session is designed for judges and court administrators who are leading through these realities every day. We'll explore how to create the kind of followership that keeps talented people engaged even when the work is hard, how to inspire teams when optimism feels in short supply, and how to move people through change without burning them out. Expect to walk away with tools to deepen trust with your staff, recognize excellence in ways that actually motivate people, and frame change so others see it as strategy rather than disruption. You'll spend time in dialogue with peers who are navigating the same terrain. This isn't theory - it's about leading effectively when the stakes are high and the path forward isn't clear.

9:00 AM to 10:30 AM

Leadership Academy: Session One

10:30 to 10:45 AM

Break

10:45 AM to 11:45 AM

Leadership Academy: Session Two

11:45 PM to 12:00 PM

Sponsor Plenary Session #1

12:00 PM to 1:30 PM

Lunch

1:30 PM to 1:50 PM

Sponsor Plenary Session #2

2:00 PM to 3:00 PM	Leadership Academy: Session Three
3:00 PM to 3:15 PM	Break
3:15 PM to 3:35 PM	Sponsor Plenary Session #3
3:40 PM to 4:30 PM	Leadership Academy: Closing
4:30 PM to 6:30 PM	Wine and Cheese Reception - Exhibits Open Governors' Hall <i>A special wine and cheese reception for conference attendees and their guest.</i>

TUESDAY, AUGUST 18th COURT LEADERSHIP PLENARY & WORKSHOP SESSIONS

7:00 AM to 4:30 PM	Registration and Conference Information Information Desk
7:00 AM to 8:00 AM	Breakfast Christina Ballroom
9:00 AM to 2:00 PM	Exhibit Hours Governors' Hall
8:00 AM to 8:15 AM	Quick Review of the Day's Events and Conference Announcements Riverfront Ballroom Hon. John J. Russo, NAPCO Board of Directors, Chair John Bello, NAPCO Executive Director
8:15 AM to 8:30 AM	2025 JUSTICE MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE'S ERNEST C. FRIESEN AWARD Riverfront Ballroom Award Presenter: TBD Recipient: To be Announced at the Conference

PLENARY PRESENTATION

8:30 AM to 9:45 AM

PLENARY 1: Leading Through Polarization: High-Trust PJ/CEO Partnerships and Stakeholders Engagement
Riverfront Ballroom

Moderator: Hon. John J. Russo, NAPCO Board of Directors, Chair

Panel: Hon. Averil Rothrock, Presiding Judge, King County Superior Court, WA
Hon. Sheila F. Hanson, Presiding Judge, Orange County Superior Court, CA
Linda Ridge, Chief Administrative Officer, King County Superior Court, WA
David H. Yamasaki, Court Executive Officer, Orange County Superior Court, CA

High-trust partnerships between Presiding Judges (PJs) and Court Executive Officers (CEOs) are essential for maintaining court stability, public trust, and operational efficiency during times of intense political polarization and threats to judicial independence. These partnerships require a combination of shared vision, clear role definition, and proactive, empathetic communication to lead court staff and engage with the community effectively.

9:45 AM to 10:00 AM

Sponsor Plenary Session #4
Riverfront Ballroom

10:00 AM to 10:45 AM

EXTENDED BREAK IN EXHIBIT AREA
Governors' Hall

CONCURRENT WORKSHOPS: 10:45 AM to 11:45 AM

Workshop 1: Delaware Business Courts
Harlan & Hollingsworth A

Moderator: Hon. Eric M. Davis, President Judge of the Superior Court of Delaware, DE

Panel: TBD

This session will focus on the Delaware Court of Chancery and the Complex Commercial Litigation Division (CCLD) of the Superior Court of Delaware. The speakers will address jurisdiction, protocols, guidelines for persons litigating in the Courts, case management, best practices, and coordination and cooperation between the Courts. The session will provide

information on these topics and why these Courts provide business dispute litigants with a sophisticated forum for resolution of their disputes.

Workshop 2: Problem-Solving, Partnership and Community – Behavioral Health Dockets that Actually Coordinate Care
Harlan & Hollingsworth B

Presenters: Scott Block, Statewide Behavioral Health Administrator, Illinois Administrative Office, IL
Hon. Michael W. Feetterer, Chief Judge, 22nd Judicial Circuit, IL
Dan Wallis, Trial Court Administrator, 22nd Judicial Circuit, IL

National judicial codes of ethics, such as the Code of Conduct for United States Judges, balance the need for impartiality with the benefits of community engagement. Behavioral health dockets work best when courts move beyond case processing and become conveners of coordinated community care. This session explores how judges and courts can use their unique authority to facilitate improved responses to individuals with behavioral health needs.

Workshop 3: Judicial Independence: Hamilton to Today

Lobdell Rom

Presenters: Hon. Lawrence King, Judge, Paradise Valley Municipal Court, AZ
Darren Breslin, Staff Attorney, PA Commission on Judicial Independence, PA

This session explores the enduring principle of judicial independence—its constitutional roots, modern challenges, and actionable solutions for today’s courts. Beginning with The Federalist No. 78, we will revisit Alexander Hamilton’s assertion that the judiciary, “having neither force nor will, but merely judgment,” must remain insulated from political and public pressure to safeguard the rule of law. The program examines the twin pillars of independence—institutional (structure, tenure, and funding) and decisional (freedom in judgment)—and the growing vulnerabilities posed by judicial elections, fiscal threats, and misinformation.

A case study of the Pennsylvania Commission on Judicial Independence illustrates how courts can counter these pressures through civic education, outreach, and rapid-response communication. We will explore the Commission’s Civics Education Toolkit, Speakers Bureau, and data-driven impact, then explore a practical “Build It in Your State” playbook. Interactive exercises will help courts design a plan for local implementation. Take aways: concrete tools, ready-made materials, and renewed commitment to defend demonstrate judicial independence as the constitutional foundation of

public trust in the Judiciary.

11:45 AM to 1:15 PM **Lunch**
Christina Ballroom

PLENARY PRESENTATION

1:15 PM to 2:45 PM **PLENARY 2: The AI Imperative: Leading Effective and Responsible Court Innovation**
Harlan & Hollingsworth A

Moderator: Kevin Bowling, Trial Court Administrator (Ret.), MI

Panel: Stacey Marz, State Court Administrator, AK

Hon. Sam Thumma, Arizona Court of Appeals, AZ

Roger Rand, NACM Vice-President, OR

Michael Navin, Principal Court Management Consultant, National Center for State Courts, MI

Courts are standing at a defining moment as generative AI rapidly reshapes how the public expects to access justice. This dynamic session brings together leading judges and court administrators to explore how AI can streamline court operations, support judicial decision-making, and expand access for the public—while keeping human judgment and fairness at the center.

Participants will see real examples of AI improving administrative efficiency, enhancing legal research, and preparing courts for emerging challenges like AI-generated evidence. The panel will also introduce a practical framework for responsible implementation, including human-in-the-loop safeguards, clear governance policies, and strong data protections.

Designed for court leaders, this session highlights both the promise and the guardrails needed to ensure AI strengthens—not compromises—public trust in the justice system.

2:45 PM to 3:05 PM **Sponsor Plenary Session #5**
Riverfront Ballroom

3:05 PM to 3:30 PM **BREAK**

CONCURRENT WORKSHOPS: 3:30 PM to 4:30 PM

Workshop 4: Technology & AI: Asset or Deficit for Self-Represented Litigants... It Depends!

Harlan & Hollingsworth A

Moderator: Jill Roberts, Principal Court Management Consultant, National Center for State Courts

Panel: Stacey Marz, Administrative Director, Alaska Court System

Jason Tashae, Access to Justice and Technology Expert

Andy Wirkus, Senior Court Management Consultant, National Center for State Courts

Courts grapple with how to responsibly integrate technology, including Artificial Intelligence (AI) into a wide variety of court processes, including helping court users navigate court systems. If technology initiatives are implemented thoughtfully and with care, they can improve access to the courts, promote fair and equitable justice outcomes, enhance the work experience for court personnel, increase efficiency in case processing, and promote public trust and confidence in the courts. At the same time, these tools carry real risks and limitations that must be carefully weighed.

From chatbots to machine translation and remote appearances to AI pleading checkers, this session will highlight the importance of access to justice considerations when evaluating technology solutions, the value of using technology to advance access, and lessons learned from (including challenges and setbacks) from piloting different technologies in practice.

Workshop 5: From Trust to Action: Operationalizing Procedural Justice in Daily Leadership

Harlan & Hollingsworth B

Presenter: Hon. Kevin Burke, Retired Judge, Hennepin County, MN

The development of procedural fairness (aka procedural justice) has its antecedents in academic research about industrial management. The more employees feel like management respects and values them the more effective the workforce will be. The very best leaders give voice to employees and respect them.

A good leader inspires people to have confidence in the leader; a great leader inspires people to have confidence in themselves. It is not easy to be a public employee these days. Budgets are tight, the workload is often heavy and

feeling appreciated for your contribution is not as prevalent as it should be. Many of the presentations on procedural fairness focus on courtroom behavior of judges. In this workshop we will focus on procedural fairness as a court management approach. Both Presiding judges and Court Managers hopefully can benefit from a discussion of how to become an even better leader than you presently are.

Workshop 6: Connecting the Workforce to our mission

Lobdell Room

Presenters: Hon. Pamela Gates, Presiding Judge, Maricopa County, AZ
Raymond Billotte, Judicial Branch Administrator, Maricopa County, AZ

This session explores how we can strengthen our workforce by grounding both new and experienced employees in a clear understanding of the court's role in society and their responsibility in delivering procedural fairness. Through an examination of the programs that support onboarding, training, and ongoing development, we will highlight how these efforts help employees internalize our core values — treating every person with courtesy, dignity, and respect; communicating procedures clearly and transparently; and demonstrating the court's commitment to resolving matters fairly. By aligning workforce development with our mission, we reinforce a culture where employees are engaged, supported, and equipped to contribute meaningfully to public trust and confidence.

SOCIAL EVENT

6:15 PM Meet in Lobby to walk to the Baseball Stadium

6:30 PM to 9:30 PM Social Event: [Wilmington Blue Rocks Baseball Game](#)

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 19th COURT LEADERSHIP PLENARY AND WORKSHOPS | NAPCO ANNUAL MEETING

7:30 AM to 12:30 PM Registration and Conference Information
[Information Desk](#)

7:00 AM to 8:30 AM Breakfast
[Christina Ballroom](#)

7:00 AM to 8:00 AM **NAPCO Board of Directors' Breakfast Meeting**
Pusey & Jones Room

PLENARY PRESENTATIONS

8:30 AM to 9:45 AM **PLENARY 3: Modernizing Jury Selection: Creating Smarter Systems to Produce Better Juries**
Riverfront Ballroom

Moderator: Jawwaad Johnson, Director, Center for Jury Studies, National Center for State Courts, NJ N
Panel: Hon. Pamela Gates, Presiding Judge, Maricopa County, AZ
 Raymond Billotte, Judicial Branch Administrator, Maricopa County, AZ

Across the country, courts are under pressure to do more with less, while maintaining public trust, improving the juror experience, and ensuring a fair-cross section. This plenary session highlights work being done to address the challenges of modern jury administration.

The session will explore the growing use of remote questionnaires in case-specific selection and introduce practical strategies to increase judicial buy-in. Just as important, the panel will examine the measurable impact on juror satisfaction.

This plenary offers a clear-eyed look at what works, what doesn't, and what's next. Participants will leave with concrete ideas to modernize their own jury processes while strengthening both efficiency and public confidence in the system.

9:45 AM to 10:00 AM **BREAK**

10:00 AM to 11:00 AM **PLENARY 4: Preparing for High-Profile Cases**
Riverfront Ballroom

Presenter: Sean O'Sullivan, Immediate Past President, Conference of Court Public Information Officers (CCPIO)

It used to be that when the national media showed up in overwhelming numbers at a courthouse door, it was a rare event and usually called something like "The Trial of the Century." But in this click-driven internet age, mass media onslaughts appear to happen almost monthly. News organizations are drifting away from beat coverage and focusing more on covering the story of the moment, often descending en masse on courts large and small. Think Nancy Guthrie

in Tucson, Arizona, and Alec Baldwin in Santa Fe, New Mexico. This happened not too long ago in the state of Delaware for the Dominion v. Fox News defamation case and the Conference of Court Public Information Officers' immediate past president, Sean O'Sullivan, handled the media for his court. He will talk about best practices to deal with this modern phenomenon. Sean will discuss tips, practical examples, and lessons learned from Delaware and other court systems across the country.

11:00 AM to 11:15 AM

BREAK

PLENARY CLOSING PRESENTATION

11:15 AM to 12:15 PM

PLENARY 5: Leadership Character in the Courts
Riverfront Ballroom

Moderator: Hon. Paula Carey, Chief Justice of the Massachusetts Trial Court (Ret.), MA

Panel: Hon. Pamela Gates, Presiding Judge, Maricopa County, AZ

Raymond Billotte, Judicial Branch Administrator, Maricopa County, AZ

David H. Yamasaki, Court Executive Officer, Orange County Superior Court, CA

Leadership character is the quality that guides judicial leaders when rules or routines don't provide clear answers. It shows most clearly under pressure—when resources are tight, decisions are scrutinized, and the stakes are high. In courts, character is reflected in how discretion is used, how people are treated, how difficult issues are addressed, and how leaders take responsibility when outcomes aren't perfect. When judges and administrators act consistently with core judicial values, they strengthen trust, professionalism, and the legitimacy of the justice system.

12:15 PM to 12:30 PM

CONFERENCE ADJOURNMENT AND CLOSING REMARKS

Hon. John J. Russo, NAPCO Board of Directors, Chair

John Bello, NAPCO Executive Director