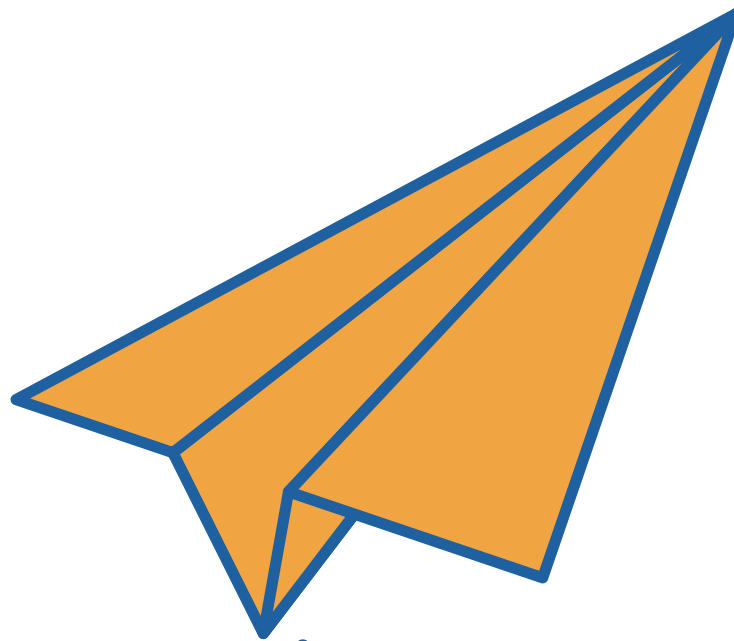




Washington Association
of **COUNTY OFFICIALS**

TIME TO LEAD



**WACO's 67th Annual Conference
September 30 - October 2, 2025
Three Rivers Convention Center
Kennewick, Washington 99336**



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General Information

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 - Personalize your agenda
 - Get event updates and notifications
 - Connect with other attendees
 - Create and join meet-ups
 - And so much more!
- > **How to join:**
 - Scan the QR code and download Whova from the App Store or Google Play.
 - Sign in or create an account with the email you used to register.
 - *If you have trouble joining with the QR code search for the event & enter invite code: **4gdbj6vj24***



SCAN TO DOWNLOAD
WHOVA

Who's Who



- > **Get to know WACO affiliate acronyms!**
 - WSACA Washington State Association of County Auditors
 - WSACA Washington State Association of County Assessors
 - WSACC Washington State Association of County Clerks
 - WACME Washington Association of Coroners & Medical Examiners
 - WAPA Washington Association of Prosecuting Attorneys
 - WSSA Washington State Sheriffs' Association
 - WSACT Washington State Association of County Treasurers




Badges

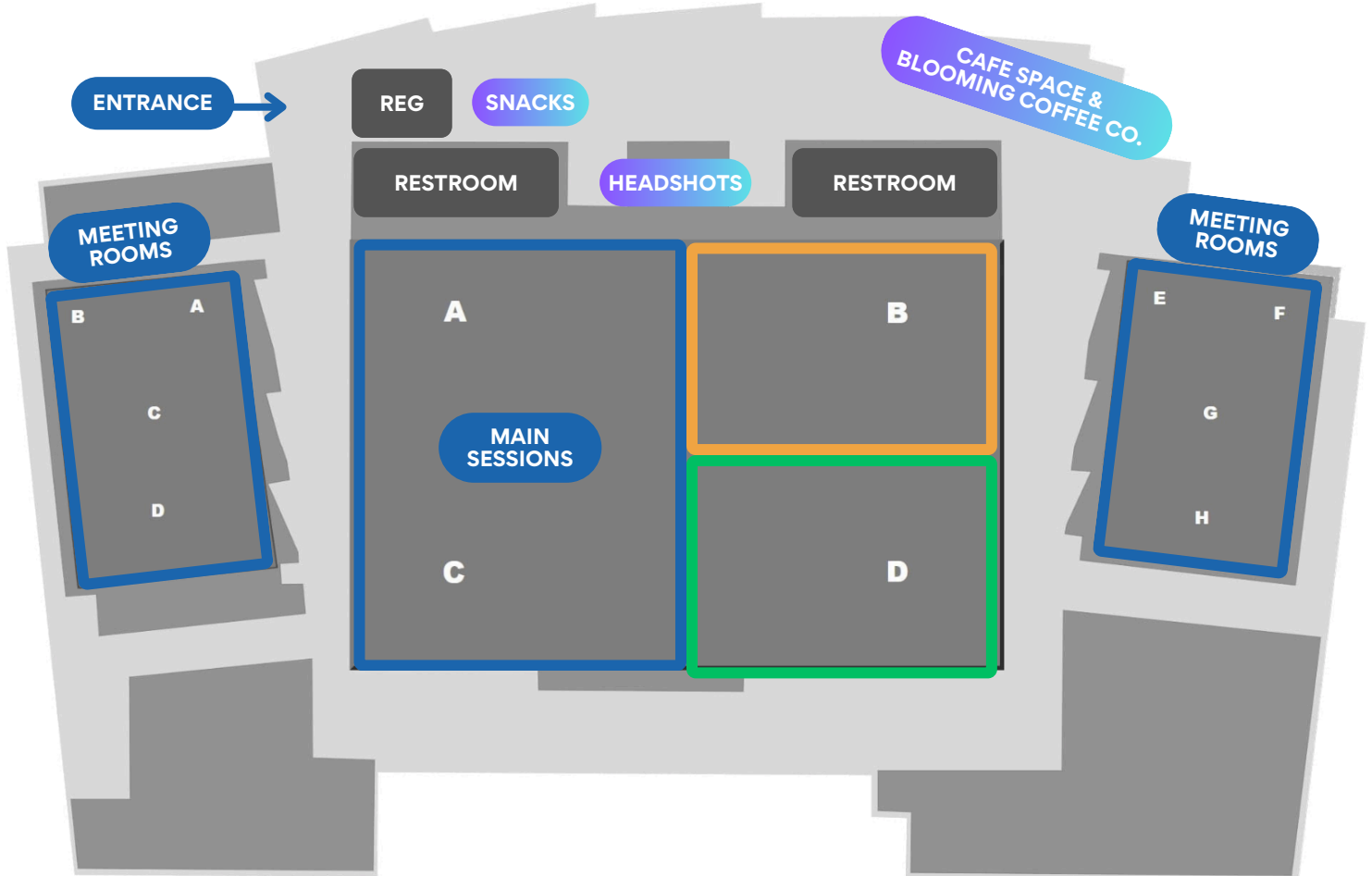


- > **Visit the registration booth to make sure you're accounted for!**

Don't forget to check-in at the registration booth and pick up your name badge. Your badge does more than just help others know who you are - it's also your meal ticket, contains allergy alert slips for hotel staff, and can hold business cards that you collect during the event!

Conference Map

 Hospitality Events  Meeting Spaces  Vendor Hall



FREE ON-SITE HEADSHOTS AVAILABLE TUESDAY/WEDNESDAY/THURSDAY




Michael Peterson - PETERSON PRO MEDIA
541-399-2259 | michael@petersonpromedia.com
www.michaelpetersonphotography.com

When you get your free headshot, please be prepared to contribute a 30 second - 1 minute video statement on "what I appreciate about my [another county WACO member role - e.g. what I appreciate about my Sheriff]". As part of the WACO project Know Your County Officials, we are putting together a compilation video of elected officials expressing appreciation of their peers!

**Headshots are provided after the event.*

AGENDA

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 30TH

8:00AM - 4:30PM	Registration & Check-In	LOBBY
8:00AM - 5:00PM	Exhibitor & Vendor Fair	LOBBY/GREAT HALL B
8:30AM - 12:00PM	WACO Board Meeting	BOARDROOM
8:00AM - 4:00PM	WSACA Assessors	MEETING ROOM G
8:00AM - 2:00PM	WSSA Sheriffs	MEETING ROOM A
8:00AM - 2:00PM	WACME Coroners & Medical Examiners	MEETING ROOM B
12:00PM - 4:00PM	WSACT Treasurers	MEETING ROOM C
1:00PM - 4:00PM	WSACC Clerks	MEETING ROOM D
2:00PM - 3:00PM	Cross-Affiliate Coroner/ME, Prosecutor, Sheriff <i>Navigating privacy regulations, the media, and what info to share according to regulations. Sharing of county approaches, information, and different policies.</i>	MEETING ROOM E/F
3:00PM - 4:00PM	WAPA Prosecutors	MEETING ROOM A
 4:00PM - 5:00PM	Making Time to Connect WACO has six categories of counties by population size. Come connect with your peers in like-size counties and talk about issues of interest and concern and how WACO can provide support!	
	> Category 1 & 2 Counties <i>King, Clark, Pierce, Snohomish, Spokane</i>	MEETING ROOM C
	> Category 3 & 4 Counties <i>Benton, Cowlitz, Franklin, Grant, Kitsap, Skagit, Thurston, Yakima, Whatcom, Chelan, Clallam, Grays Harbor, Island, Lewis, Mason, Walla Walla</i>	MEETING ROOM D
	> Category 5 & 6 Counties <i>Adams, Asotin, Douglas, Jefferson, Kittitas, Klickitat, Okanogan, Pacific, Stevens, Whitman, Columbia, Ferry, Garfield, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, San Juan, Skamania, Wahkiakum</i>	MEETING ROOM E/F
5:00PM - 7:00PM	President's Reception Join us to celebrate WACO President Amy Cziske! Light hors d'oeuvres will be provided as well as a non-host bar.	GREAT HALL A/C
7:00PM - 10:00PM	Hospitality Event  Enjoy karaoke, guided painting, a cornhole tournament, and more! Great Hall A/C Guided Painting Great Hall D Cornhole Room H Karaoke	MULTIPLE ROOMS

AGENDA

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 1ST

8:00AM - 4:00PM Registration & Check-In *LOBBY*

8:00AM - 5:00PM Exhibitor & Vendor Fair *LOBBY/GREAT HALL B*

7:30AM - 8:30AM Breakfast *GREAT HALL A/C*

8:30AM - 10:30AM Opening Ceremony & WACO Business Meeting *GREAT HALL A/C*

10:30AM - 11:00AM Exhibitor Fair/Break *LOBBY/GREAT HALL B*
Snacks Sponsored by Idaho Central Credit Union

11:00AM - 12:00PM Keynote: Commander/Dr. Mary Kelly *GREAT HALL A/C*

12:00PM - 1:30PM Lunch *GREAT HALL A/C*

★ **1:30PM - 2:30PM** Educational Breakout Sessions
2:45PM - 3:45PM Educational Breakout Sessions

Educational breakout sessions will run twice consecutively to give attendees the chance to engage on topics that interest them.

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➤ **Leveraging AI for Public Communication** *MEETING ROOM A/B*

➤ **Sheriff Role in Elections** *MEETING ROOM EF*

➤ **BLA & Segregations** *MEETING ROOM D*

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 **Washington Counties Risk Pool**
Created by Counties for Counties

➤ **Legal Autonomy of Elected Officials** *MEETING ROOM H*

4:00PM - 6:00PM **Getting Involved with WACO** *MEETING ROOM G*

This is YOUR association! Come find out more about what WACO has to offer in terms of services, but also as a means for enhancing your skills and experience as a leader among your peers!

4:00PM - 6:00PM **Chief Deputy/Senior Staff Gathering** *MEETING ROOM C*

Our members rely on their chief deputies and senior staff! This is an opportunity to network with your peers in other counties and find out what WACO means for you.

6:00PM - 8:00PM Banquet Dinner *GREAT HALL A/C*
Banquet and WA Counties Scholarship Fundraiser. There will be a non-host bar, live DJ, and a raffle!

8:00PM - 10:00PM Hospitality Event *MULTIPLE ROOMS*



Enjoy karaoke, guided painting, a cornhole tournament, and more!
Great Hall D Cornhole | Room H Karaoke

AGENDA

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 2ND

8:00AM - 11:30AM	Registration & Check-In	LOBBY
8:00AM - 2:00PM	Exhibitor & Vendor Fair	LOBBY/GREAT HALL B
7:30AM - 8:30AM	Breakfast	GREAT HALL A/C
8:30AM - 9:00AM	WACO Meeting/Closing Remarks	GREAT HALL A/C
9:00AM - 11:00AM	Featured Workshop: Success Signals	GREAT HALL A/C
<div><div>Sponsored by</div><div> <small>Washington State DEPARTMENT OF ENTERPRISE SERVICES</small></div></div>		
11:00AM - 1:00PM	Exhibitor & Vendor Fair	LOBBY/GREAT HALL B
<i>Snacks Sponsored by Election Systems & Software</i>		
11:00AM - 1:00PM	Cross-Affiliate Auditor, Assessor, Prosecutor, Sheriff, Treasurer - <i>Continue ongoing discussions on property fraud.</i>	GREAT HALL A/C

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Session & Speaker Details

Featured Keynote: Taking Time to Lead Through Challenges and Changes Commander/Dr. Mary Kelly

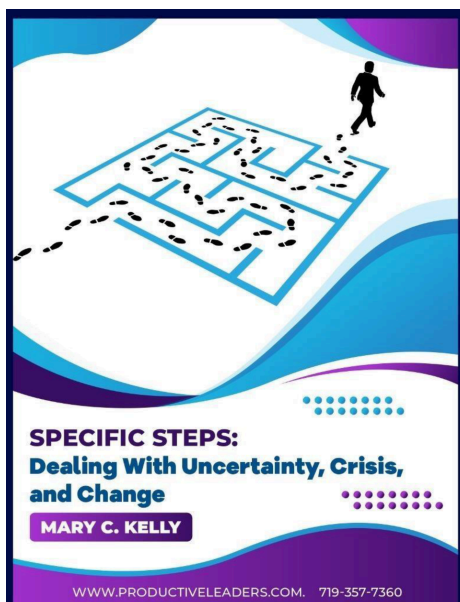


County officials in Washington are pulled in countless directions — responding to community needs, managing budgets, navigating policy changes, and leading diverse teams. Too often, there's little time left for thoughtful leadership. Yet during times of disruption and uncertainty, pausing to take time to lead isn't a luxury — it's a strategic necessity.

In this engaging, entertaining, and insightful keynote, leadership expert and economist Dr. Mary Kelly will guide you through proven strategies to help you lead yourself, your teams, and your county with purpose and clarity, even when resources are stretched thin and demands are high.

County governments are the backbone of communities. The decisions you make impact public health, safety, infrastructure, and economic stability. With constant changes — new laws, shifting demographics, technological advances, and evolving public needs — effective leadership is more important than ever.

This program equips you with the mindset and skills to think, develop, and act with intention. When you take time to lead, you create space for better decisions, stronger teams, and a more resilient future for your community.



YOU CAN GET MARY'S FREE WORKBOOK, DEALING WITH THE STRESS OF UNCERTAINTY, CRISIS, & CHANGE

More and more, leaders and managers have to help their teams cope with the stress surrounding a crisis, challenge, or change. If you or your teams are struggling to cope in a crisis, this workbook has techniques that may help.

SCAN ME



Session & Speaker Details

Featured Workshop - Success Signals

Presenter: Rhonda Hilyer



Rhonda Hilyer, CEO and founder of Agreement Dynamics is an international consultant with a reputation for helping convert traditional, conflict-based environments into productive, collaborative ones. Her training programs and books on leadership, conflict resolution, negotiation, effective communication, and on change processes offer powerful new insights into solving difficult problems. Her client list is extensive and diverse, with a wide variety of local, state, national, and international public and private sector groups.

Ms. Hilyer's book, *Success Signals*, is a powerful tool for enhancing communication and persuasion skills in both personal and professional arenas. Her workshop on *Success Signals* is aired on public television and is also extremely popular at national conferences of elected officials, CEOs, and trade organizations.

Ms. Hilyer has developed RESOLVE, a proven method for making interest-based processes work in a variety of conflict and group decision-making settings. Unlike other approaches, RESOLVE provides tools for reaching agreements and building good relationships. Her facilitation efforts have been successful in reaching agreement on thousands of labor contracts, as well as in resolving workplace conflicts, settling natural resource issues, and in complex and multi-party negotiations.

Prior to founding Agreement Dynamics, Rhonda Hilyer served 20 years as a local, national, and international labor leader, negotiator, and trainer. She rose quickly through the ranks by earning the respect of union members and employers alike. In 1986, following the sharp decline and near collapse of a Seattle labor organization, Rhonda restored morale and coached the 8,000-members through a sweeping cultural change. Her strong focus on vision building, goal setting, values clarification/commitment, and strategic planning resulted in increased membership and economic solvency.

A civic-minded citizen, Rhonda Hilyer has served on numerous boards and commissions, including the Washington State Convention and Trade Center Board, the Goodwill Games Board of Directors, as a Trustee to the Seattle Community College Board and as a Commissioner on the Los Angeles Employee Relations Board.



WORKSHOP SPONSORED BY



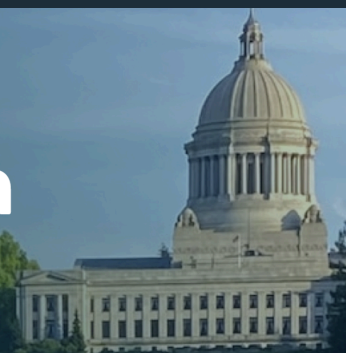
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Session & Speaker Details

SESSION: LEVERAGING AI FOR PUBLIC COMMUNICATION

Have you been curious about artificial intelligence and how it can be used to help you craft your communications with the public? Or have you had concerns about what to look out for when using or working with AI? This panel discussion will offer both best practices and cautions for using AI, while also offering helpful tips on how you can use it to improve your communication with the public.

★ **BREAKOUT SESSION SPONSORED BY** **polimorphic**

SESSION SPEAKERS:

Danny Hagen, Skagit County Assessor



Danny Hagen serves as the elected Assessor of Skagit County, where he leads a team responsible for valuing over 80,000 parcels of real and personal property. Known for his transparent and data-driven approach, Danny advocates for collaborative, sustainable, and efficient government practices—using technology and AI to improve public communication and taxpayer service.

Danny is an IAAO Professional Member and is currently pursuing his Mass Appraisal Specialist (MAS) designation. He serves as Vice President of the Washington State Association of County Assessors (WSACA) and Secretary/Treasurer of the Washington Association of County Officials (WACO), where he works to advance legislative and administrative solutions that support fairness in taxation and strong public service. In his community, Danny is Board Chair of Chinook Enterprises and Treasurer for Community Action of Skagit County, where he supports efforts to expand economic inclusion and address poverty.

Matt King, WA Office of Privacy and Data Protection's
Privacy & Data Protection Manager



Matt King is a Privacy & Data Protection Manager in Washington's Office of Privacy and Data Protection, within Washington Technology Solutions (WaTech). He drives and manages enterprise privacy initiatives to help state agencies effectively handle and protect the personal information they collect about the people they serve. He is leading the development of state AI risk assessment tools and processes and chairs the state's AI Community of Practice Risk Subcommittee.

Prior to joining WaTech, Matt was the Privacy Officer for the Washington State Health Care Authority, an Assistant Attorney General, and a law clerk at Division 1 of the Washington State Court of Appeals. He has a degree in International Finance and Marketing from the University of Miami and graduated with honors from the University of Washington School of Law. He holds Fellow of Information Privacy (FIP), Certified Information Privacy Professional/US (CIPP/US), Certified Information Privacy Manager (CIPM), and Artificial Intelligence Governance Professional (AIGP) credentials from the International Association of Privacy Professionals.

Session & Speaker Details

SESSION: SHERIFF ROLE IN ELECTIONS

Does the Sheriff have a role to play in elections in Washington State? The answer is a resounding yes. In this training you will learn about the Sheriff's role in election security, some case studies, and what the best practices are for Sheriff staff when handling election related matters in the State of Washington.

SESSION SPEAKERS:

Tina Barton, Senior Elections Expert at Committee for Safe and Secure Elections



Tina Barton is a Senior Election Expert with The Elections Group, bringing over 32 years of distinguished service in government at the federal, county, and municipal levels. She is a founding member of the Committee for Safe and Secure Elections (CSSE) and currently serves as Co-Chair of CSSE. Ms. Barton was recently appointed by the U.S. Conference of Mayors to the U.S. Election Assistance Commission Board of Advisors.

The Committee for Safe and Secure Elections features cross partisan experts in election administration and law enforcement who aim to support policies and practices that protect election workers and voters from violence, threats, and intimidation. The Committee also works to build relationships and trust between election officials and law enforcement to better equip both to prevent and respond to threats and violence against voters and election workers.

Chance Walkama, Laramie County Sheriff's Office



Undersheriff Chance Walkama has over 15 years of law enforcement experience. He began his career as a detention deputy and K-9 handler at the Laramie County Sheriff's Office. He later worked for the Pine Bluffs, WY, Police Department for nine years and served as Police Chief for three years. He is an Air Force veteran and a commissioned officer in the Wyoming National Guard. He holds a master's degree in human resources and a bachelor's in finance.



LET US KNOW WHAT YOU THINK!

SCAN ME



SCAN HERE TO ACCESS SURVEY

Share what you think of the sessions you attend and give your opinion on other trainings, panels, & discussions you'd like WACO to provide!

Session & Speaker Details

SESSION: LEGAL AUTONOMY OF ELECTED OFFICIALS

So you are an elected official, you have the power to run your office as you please, or so you think. In this training you will learn the statutory autonomy of separately elected county officials, as well as some cases where this has been litigated, and some practical advice to navigating the balance of autonomy and working with your commissioners.

★ **BREAKOUT SESSION SPONSORED BY**



Washington Counties Risk Pool
Created by Counties for Counties

SESSION SPEAKER:

Greg Banks, Island County Prosecuting Attorney



Greg Banks is in his seventh term as the Island County Prosecuting Attorney. After a short career as an engineer, Greg graduated from the University of Washington School of Law in 1993. He began his legal career as a deputy prosecutor in Island County that year.

Greg's predecessor announced he would not run for re-election in 1998, amid a highly publicized dispute with the county commissioners over funding the prosecutor's office. Greg was the only attorney in Island County naïve enough to want to lead an office in crisis.

In 2009, Greg served as the President of WAPA, and has sat on the WAPA Board of Directors for 14 non-consecutive years, starting in 2006. Greg was WAPA's representative to the Supreme Court's Judicial Information Systems Committee (JISC) from 2004 – 2008. Greg was one of two prosecutors on the Bar Association's Council for Public Defense, from 2010 – 2012. Greg created WAPA's Judicial Evaluation Committee in 2008 and served as its chair for nine years, evaluating dozens of candidates and sitting appellate judges.

Greg has been the co-chair of WAPA's Appellate Committee since 2019. Greg was the co-chair of WAPA's Criminal Training Committee from 2018 - 2025. Greg served on WAPA's Best Practices Committee and co-chaired a task force to develop model a "Brady" policy, for police officer impeachment disclosure. This year, Greg has been nominated by WAPA to be a Governor's appointee to the Forensic Investigations Council. Greg is a member of WAPA's Legislative Committee. In 2016 Greg became the Washington State Director for the National District Attorney's Association and has served on that Board ever since. In 2024, the membership of that organization elected Greg to be a Vice President.

Greg has been privileged to be involved in significant criminal and civil cases during his career. Greg successfully argued the landmark case of *State v. Gamble* before the Supreme Court on behalf of King, Pierce, Clark and Island Counties. The case was an 8-1 decision that allowed hundreds of Washington murder prosecutions to proceed that had been blocked by the Court's earlier ruling in *State v. Andress*. Greg was the plaintiff in *State ex rel Banks v. Drummond*, that established county commissioners could not hire outside counsel without the authorization of the prosecutor. Most recently, Greg has defended the Island County Auditor's authority to control the ballot processing rooms. One political party official has been convicted of intentionally violating those rules, and another's trial is pending based on the same charge.

Session & Speaker Details

BLA & SEGREGATIONS: COORDINATION AMONG PLANNING DEPARTMENTS, ASSESSORS, AUDITORS, AND TREASURERS

What is a BLA – or boundary line adjustment or a segregation (property division), how does the system of these changes to real estate work in Washington. In this panel discussion we will follow the process from planner, to auditor, and treasurer.

SESSION SPEAKERS:

Marianne Nichols, Pend Oreille County Auditor



Marianne has served as the Pend Oreille County Auditor for 19 years, where she oversees elections, vehicle licensing, recording of historical documents, as well as budgeting and financial services. She is dedicated to ensuring transparency, accuracy, and fiscal stewardship in local government. Outside of her official duties, Marianne shares her journey as a living kidney donor, inspiring others with her story of faith, friendship, and purpose. She also enjoys volunteering in her community, where she works to ensure people feel valued and appreciated.

Michelle Mercer, Benton County Planning Manager



Michelle is the Planning Manager for Benton County and has been with the County for ten years. She has a keen interest in water law, renewable energy project siting, and floodplain management topics as well as advocating for solutions to rural land use issues. Before joining Benton County, Michelle served as an aquaculture Peace Corps volunteer in Zambia Africa and previously worked in forestry policy. She currently resides in her hometown of Prosser, the birthplace of Washington's wine industry, and when not at work you can find her fishing, backpacking in the wilderness, or traveling to the far corners of the world.

Dan Lindgren, Grays Harbor County Assessor



Dan has served as the Elected Assessor of Grays Harbor County for over a decade, where he leads a staff of 16 in administering property tax programs and appraising more than 64,000 parcels. With nearly 19 years in the Assessor's Office, he brings extensive experience in both appraisal and leadership.

In 2024, Dan was elected as the Assessor's Liaison on the WACO Executive Board and has chaired the WSACA Computer Technology Committee for 10 years, driving collaboration and innovation among Washington assessors. He is also active in the West Puget Sound Chapter of the IAAO, serving as Emcee and keynote speaker at its annual spring seminar.

Leadership & Communication

While working with WACO President & Kittitas County Treasurer Amy Cziske's 2025 theme, Time to Lead, WACO staff realized that membership at large truly resonated with the theme's focus. Through their regular communication with the WACO team, many members echoed the same sentiment – I always want to be a better leader.

“County officials, by the nature of their office, and the process to reach their office, have a proven track record of leadership,” WACO Deputy Director Timothy Grisham shared his thoughts on the title of ‘leader’ that WACO members carry, and that their sentiment didn’t surprise him. **“The best leaders know that they can always improve. Their path to success has been paved by continuous improvement and reflection.”**

Including conference education happening during the event, this year so far WACO has provided over thirty hours of training and education to members. That’s in addition to countless meetings to help offices problem solve, consulting on legislative priorities, and brainstorming with officials on how we can best help the incoming newly electeds at next year’s NEO Conference. Each one of WACO’s offerings in 2025 pulled in great attendance from different affiliate groups, and many even brought their staff. Not only do the best leaders know that they can always improve, *they are actively striving to do so for themselves and their teams*. But, as any elected official at this week’s conference can tell you, it’s never that simple.

Rhonda Hilyer, founder of Agreement Dynamics, is presenting this year’s featured workshop, Success Signals. A renowned professional in the organizational development, conflict resolution, and facilitation world, Rhonda consults with an extensive list of household names – Boeing, Microsoft, University of Washington and Washington State University to name a few. She’s also worked with countless national and international associations, local Washington State elected officials, and counties throughout the country. She believes that time is the biggest barrier leaders face in the struggle to improve - and WACO members have echoed the thought.

“In order to access educational opportunities to further their development as leaders, time is the biggest barrier. No question about it.”

With a workload that is ever increasing, many elected officials throughout the state struggle to carve out time to breathe, let alone further their leadership education. Having worked with municipalities and a variety of public service entities, Rhonda knows this struggle intimately. It’s why she’s allowed WACO to not only make her workshop available to virtual conference attendees, but also as a member-only offering on the WACO Education Hub. Rhonda’s program is typically a four-hour or more offering, but she’s created a custom session for WACO members because she feels that her focus, communication, is vital to the success of all professional work – particularly local government offices.

“Experts maintain that 70% of conflict and misunderstandings are first caused by communication style misunderstandings. If you can use your own style to deal with that, you’ve addressed 70% of conflict.”

In Rhonda’s opinion, improving communication skills – the ability to meet others where they are, effectively delegate and share information, resolve conflict, and positively influence teams – is where the best leaders spend their time.

“A lot of leaders don’t understand how powerful they are in the eyes of those that report to them. Their words matter, their tone matters. Employees take them very seriously, and sometimes very literally.”

Hundreds of online forums discussing insecurity of being fired because of an offhanded remark from a boss proves Rhonda’s point. And the stress for those serving in the offices of WACO members is even further compounded. **“There is angst and fear –”** Rhonda says, **“How do I serve this elected? How do I do it in a way that won’t be detrimental to myself or my career?”**

Unfortunately, while communication is in the top two or three issues that comprise the recruitment and retention struggle facing many industries, including public service, it is still viewed as a soft skill. It's also used as a catch all term, which can make some leaders brush it off. Rhonda acknowledges that the focus on how we talk can feel tedious, but she pushes back on the hesitation to continue learning more about it.

“It’s a big broad word and people throw it around – it becomes kind of trite after a while. But the reality is that effective communication is the true door opener. If you want to influence your teams, community, and constituents, your understanding and style of communication is the most critical factor.”

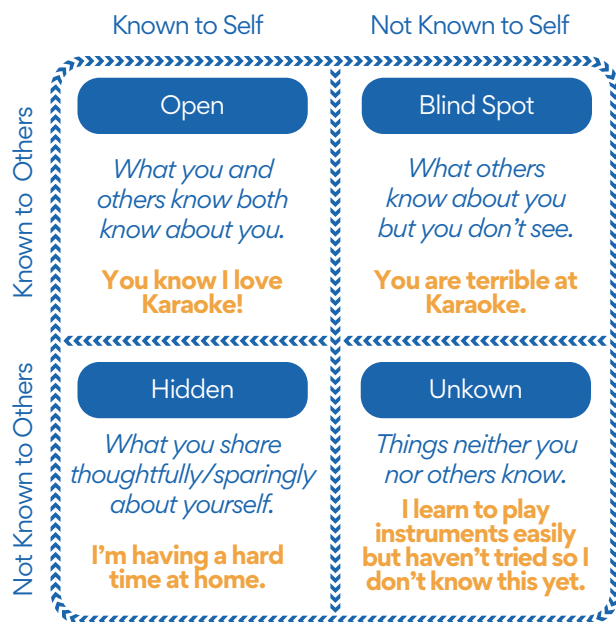
Knowing your communication style and the styles of your team, can be viewed as an exercise in professional self-awareness. Like the Johari window technique, a cognitive psychology tool used in corporate and self-improvement settings to help people better understand their relationship with themselves and others, Rhonda’s program allows us to see our blind spots.

“There’s a nice boss and that’s great, but that can cause confusion because they may not be direct enough. There are bosses that bark orders. There are even cases where a boss may come across so laissez-faire that staff are afraid to come forward with key information because they’ll be seen as pushers. You may think you’re one type of boss, but have you ever asked your team which kind they think you are?”

JOHARI WINDOW EXERCISE

Create a similar square and fill out the quadrants. Ask another person to help with the Blind Spot.

- **Open:** behavior, feelings, & motivations known to ourselves and others.
- **Blind Spot:** behavior, feelings, & motivations known to others but not to ourselves.
- **Hidden:** behavior, feelings, & motivations known to ourselves but not to others.
- **Unknown:** behavior, feelings, & motivations that are unknown



As leaders, even if there is fear about what the answer may be, there's a responsibility to find out. On top of that, there's a responsibility to find out safely. That's where Rhonda's program, Success Signals, becomes instrumental in improving office functioning. It provides a safe structure to open the door for team feedback and interaction.

“I find the fear factor is huge. If a leader says to ‘jump four feet in the air,’ too often, staff are afraid to ask why. Even though, in a lot of situations it is possible for the request to be done differently.”

While you may not think you create an atmosphere where this fear exists, Rhonda solidifies the need to find out how accurate that is. We all have blind spots.

“If staff doesn’t feel empowered or have the skills to effectively help their elected official understand the ramifications of certain actions, then the operation of the office professionally, financially, and reputationally is at stake.”

Rhonda has presented the Success Signals program to thousands of people. She's worked with 16-year-old lifeguards at public pools, nuclear physicists, MD PhDs, plumbers, pipe layers, police, firefighters, and everyone in between. The program resonates across age, education level, occupations, race, and gender, and it's been used internationally for groups big and small.

“The program has an integrity and tangibility to it. Join us on Thursday to learn how to understand yourself and others, then go back to your office with tools you can immediately use to improve communication.”

Conference Special Guests & Performers

GUEST SPEAKERS, PRESENTERS & PERFORMERS

Colors presented by the award-winning Hanford High School Army JROTC color guard commanded by Cadet Command Sergeant Major Blake Duncan & National Anthem performed by Cadet Sergeant First Class Jade Tarkong.

The JROTC program at Hanford HS was created in August 2024, and in just one year the Falcons Battalion has already won over 30 trophies in Drill, Color Guard, Air Rifle, Raider, and Aerial Drone competitions.



Office of the Washington State Auditor
Pat McCarthy



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Wednesday Lunch Remarks

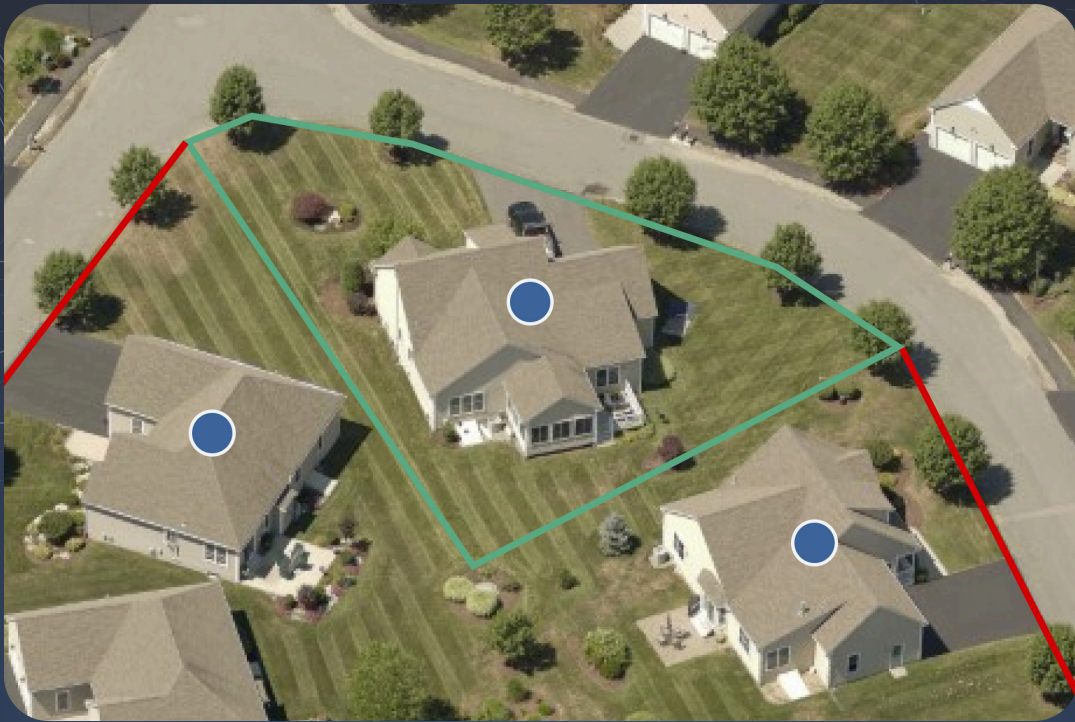
- Washington State Auditor Pat McCarthy
 - Kevin McMahan, Assistant Secretary of State
 - Randy Bolerjack, Deputy Secretary of State
-

GUIDED PAINTING SESSION



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"When adults gather around a canvas, it's about more than just painting—it's about connection. Creative events give grown-ups a chance to set aside stress, silence distractions, and tap into that playful spirit we so often leave behind in childhood. Painting together sparks laughter, conversation, and collaboration, reminding us that creativity isn't about perfection but presence. It builds community, reduces stress, and opens the door to self-expression in a way that words often can't. In a world that moves fast, these shared moments of creativity slow us down and weave bonds that linger long after the paint has dried." - **Hollie Zepeda, Owner & Creator - Art YOUR Way**



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Megan Reilly

District Manager - WA

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2025 Scholarship Recipients

The Washington Association of County Officials is honored to award three outstanding and hardworking students with scholarships from the Washington Counties Scholarship Fund.

"Once again we had many outstanding applicants, all worthy of scholarship support." said Washington Association of County Officials Executive Director Jennifer Wallace, **"WACO is proud to support the bright futures of these high achieving students and we are happy to have the commitment of all seven of our affiliate roles to supporting this important program".**



Charlotte Matulovich

Charlotte is the daughter of Janet Matulovich, Office Administrator at the Klickitat County Prosecuting Attorney's Office. She plans to attend Eastern Oregon University and study fire service management, communications, and photography.



Caitlin Fitzgerald

Caitlin is the daughter of Spokane County Clerk Tim Fitzgerald. Caitlin is studying nursing at Spokane Community College.



Julian Herring

Julian is the son of Brian Herring, Real Estate Analyst at the Skagit County Assessor's Office. He plans to attend Western Washington University and study education and engineering.



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Since 1993 the Washington Counties Scholarship Fund has awarded over \$342,000 to eligible students, and this is only possible due to the generosity of WACO members. This fund provides multiple scholarships annually to eligible children of county employees and county elected officials (assessors, auditors, clerks, coroners, medical examiners, prosecutors, sheriffs, and treasurers), **and in order to continue we need your support.**

Donate directly to the Washington Counties Scholarship Fund through our Venmo account. Every dollar enables us to continue this valuable scholarship fund that helps the children of local counties pursue further education.

Conference Sponsors

The Washington Association of County Officials would like to thank the sponsors that helped make this year's event better than ever.

This directory will let you learn about our conference sponsors and provides you with contact information for representatives that can help you with accessing the solutions provided by each group. Don't forget to drop by their booths and get your Exhibitor Bingo sheet filled out!

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Washington Counties Risk Pool (WCRP)

WCRP is a risk management pool with a membership consisting of a majority of Washington's 39 counties. Members of the WCRP benefit from significant insurance limits, broad coverage, in-house loss control, member services, and claims management. The WCRP provides its members with various risk management resources to help reduce or eliminate risk and reduce costs associated with the litigation of claims.

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The Washington Counties Risk Group (WCRG) is a property and liability risk pooling program for Washington counties. WCRG was formed in 1998 with three founding member counties, and now provides services to a quarter of the state's counties. A board of directors governs the program.

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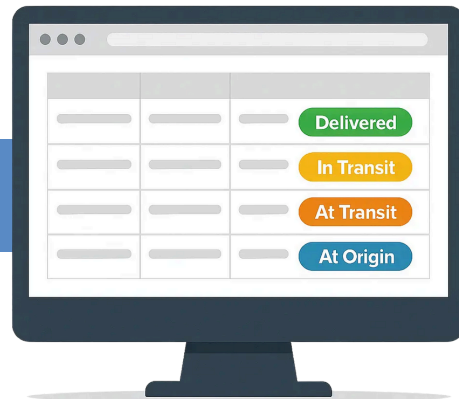
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The Importance of a Hybrid Conference

“Belonging is an intrinsic human need. As an organization comprising of members with very different offices and backgrounds, it is important to come together through our shared commitment to excellence in public service, and provide the best services we can to our communities.”

- Timothy Grisham, WACO Deputy Director

It's wild to think that just six years ago the concept of coming together was incredibly different. Pre-COVID, a hybrid or virtual conference was more of an outlier. Reserved for large-scale corporations with offices across states and countries, hybrid events were associated with the tech industry in general. You know, folks that actually *had* the knowledge of how to put one on!

While the global switch to virtual and hybrid platforms came from necessity, to follow lock-down guidance and social distancing policies, as half a decade passed by, they became more of the general standard. Whether your office uses Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or any of the other major platforms to host virtual meetings and events, there's no doubt that we've all become familiar with the various applications. (Although, people still seem to struggle finding the un-mute button from time to time...)

Certain figures estimate that during the pandemic, the number of teleworkers in the US increased from 8% to 35%, with meetings on the Zoom platform increasing from 10 million to over 300 million *daily*. Of course, WACO was a part of that growing number of Zoom meetings – pivoting to connect with our members through virtual trainings, webinars, and specialized online gatherings to keep leaders throughout the state connected and thriving.

During the pandemic, the WACO team was busy. Based on affiliate type and county size, WACO Executive Director Jennifer Wallace hosted Zoom meetings regularly with varied members - meetings that many members have said got them through a time of profound professional isolation. WACO Deputy Director Timothy Grisham made a bold move to shift the majority of WACO education programming to a virtual delivery, and to begin the framework for a robust education hub that members could access 24/7. From every side, WACO's leadership team moved to meet the growing needs of a membership that could not come together in physical space.



In late 2020, WACO hosted its first fully virtual annual conference. The event was a fantastic opportunity for many officials to reconnect at a time when stress was still boiling over in the communities they served. The 2020 conference theme, ***We're All In This Together***, really captured the spirit of support that many needed. And, importantly, it opened a larger discussion that would shape WACO's future conferences indefinitely – *a discussion about accessibility.*

As concepts of “high-risk” became normalized, many organizations, WACO included, became more cognizant that the individuals that made them great may have been facing barriers to connecting in truly deep ways. That awareness was made more intense by the idea that those specific barriers (health of self and close loved ones) had existed long before the pandemic and had simply not been discussed as openly. Already, WACO’s leadership was gearing up to make sure that future conferences could be more accessible to those members that needed it.

Compounding those already great revelations, was the data that was gathered from 2020’s breakthrough virtual conference... *more attendance from small counties than ever before!* WACO’s Deputy Director Timothy Grisham shared why, in addition to general accessibility to the individual, WACO eagerly embraced the hybrid set-up for the annual conference - and why the availability of virtual tune-in is important to WACO leadership overall.

“Travel and time away from the office is always an issue in local government. Historically, this has disproportionately affected small counties more. So it is important to offer avenues of engagement to our members, no matter the size of their county or office budget.”

From that first 2020 conference onward, WACO has worked to make almost all full membership events available in a hybrid form. There have been learning curves and bumps along the way, but the data does not lie – attendance at WACO’s annual conference has grown nearly 95% since 2020, with 23% of attendees tuning in virtually in 2024. As more members continue to attend, we depend on the audio/visual teams at our venues to help us produce the most valuable experience to our members possible. This year’s provider, Riverside Dave, is a Tri-Cities local that has helped many groups connect with their audiences far and wide. Dave feels strongly about making sure events can get to the people that need them. This event in particular, is one he’s happy to be a part of.

“I have a huge sense of pride in being able to help provide this kind of platform for local government officials to connect and learn. Channeling my passion for audio visual work in a way that helps leaders throughout Washington State become even better at serving their communities truly feels like an accomplishment.”

With many WACO conferences ahead of us, we hope to continue to partner with great industry providers to bring this important event to our full membership. From the Whova platform that has allowed county officials throughout the state to engage in forums focused on issues and solutions, to the audio/visual teams like Riverside Dave’s that help us connect with Zoom seamlessly, WACO always strives to work with others to make sure that **you**, our members, can make **Time to Lead**.



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The Pool is governed by a highly engaged Board of Directors, appointed by each member county’s legislative authority. The Board sets coverage programs, approves budgets, and directs operations with a focus on maintaining the health and long-term strength of the Pool. Daily operations are carried out by the Executive Director and risk pool staff.

NOTES

Exhibitor Bingo

The WACO Annual Conference has a ton of amazing, industry leading exhibitors and vendors in attendance this year. Take some time to check out each booth and get a mark from the exhibitor behind it. Once your bingo sheet is completely crossed out, find a WACO staff member at the registration booth to get your exclusive Exhibitor Bingo prize!



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