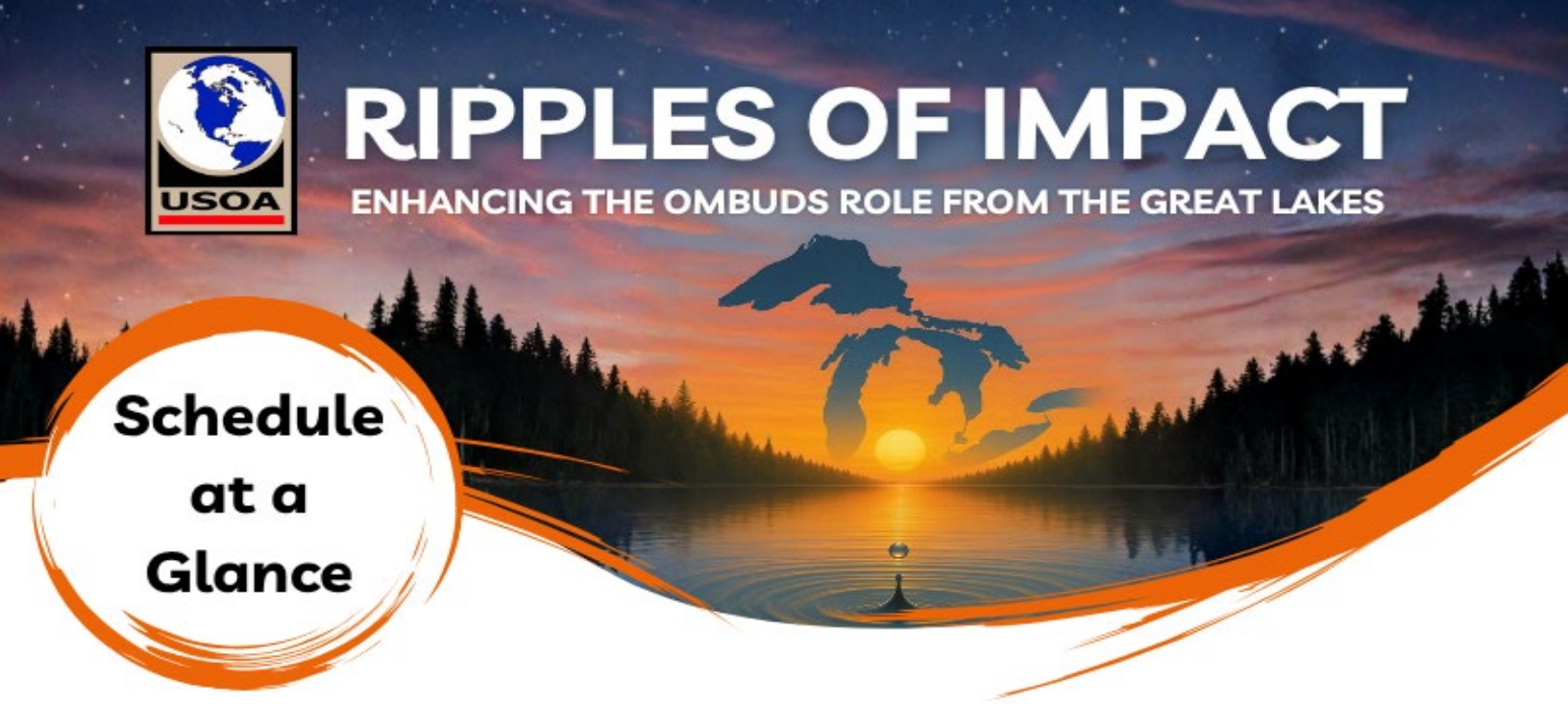

United States Ombudsman Association
45th Annual Conference
Schedule at a Glance

Monday, August 31, 2026

7:00am	**Registration Open**
7:00am-9:00am	**Breakfast** **Location:** Governors C
9:00am - 4:30pm	**New Ombudsman Training** ***Session Instructor(s):*** Jordan Steffen, Deputy Ombudsman, Office of the Colorado Child Protection Ombudsman; Ryan Speidel, Child Advocate, Michigan Office of the Child Advocate **Location:** Tower A
9:00am - 4:30pm	**Strategic Planning** ***Session Instructor(s):*** *Dr. Steven Goodwin* **-** *Turning West* **Location:** Peninsula BC
12:00pm - 1:00pm	**Lunch** **Location:** Governors C
2:45pm – 3:00pm	**Break - Afternoon and all-day registrants only**

Tuesday, September 1, 2026

7:00am	**Registration Open**
7:00am - 9:00am	**Breakfast- morning or full day registrants only** **Location:** Governors C

9:00am - 4:30pm **New Ombudsman Training**
Session Instructor(s): Jordan Steffen, Deputy Ombudsman, Office of the Colorado Child Protection Ombudsman; Ryan Speidel, Child Advocate, Michigan Office of the Child Advocate
Location: Tower A

9:00am - 4:30pm **Conflict Management & Mediator Techniques**
Session Instructor(s): Dispute Resolution Center – Ann Arbor, Michigan
Location: Peninsula BC

9:00am -12:00pm **Recentering Ombuds Principles Through Equine Assisted Learning**
Session Instructor(s): Jan Stump
Location: Off Site: Peace Ranch (Off-site)

12:00pm -1:30pm **Lunch: Afternoon or full day registrants only**
Location: Governors C

1:30pm – 4:30pm **Future Proofing Child and Family Advocacy: A Pre-conference Power Session**
Children & Families Chapter Pre-Conference
Location: Peninsula A

2:45pm – 3:00pm **Break - Afternoon and all-day registrants only**

5:30pm **Registration desk closes**

6:00pm - 8:00pm **Beach Reception**
Location: Beach Club Deck

****Hors d'oeuvres are included in full conference registration fee.*

Wednesday, September 2, 2026

MORNING SESSIONS

7:00am **Registration Open**

7:50am - 9:50am **Breakfast**
Location: Governors C

8:30am – 9:00am **Conference Opening and Welcome**

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Conference Co-Hosts, USOA President
Location: Governors C

9:00am -10:00am **Plenary Session 1- Billie Jo Garcia Staying in the Ombuds Lane: The Ombuds Paradox**
Location: Governors C

10:00am – 10:15am **Break**

10:15am - 12:00pm **Plenary Session 2** | Open Café Style Discussions about Critical & Emerging Issues
Location: Governors C

12:00pm -1:00pm **Lunch**
Location: Governors C

1:00pm – 2:30pm **BLOCK ONE AFTERNOON SESSIONS**

Participants will attend one of the following breakout sessions.

A) **Learning Across States – Leveraging the Council of State Governments to Support Ombudsman Offices**
Session Instructor(s): Heather Shaffer – The Council of State Governments
Location: Peninsula A

B) **Building a Meaningful Trauma-Informed Culture**
Session Instructor(s): Margaret Zadra - Minnesota Office of the Ombuds for Corrections and Hilary Mueller, OTR/L, MSW, LICSW - Ouroboros Therapy
Location: Governors C

C) **Teaching Foster Youth Their Rights Through Innovation**
Session Instructor(s): Parker Terese – Speaking Through Parkers Purpose
Location: Peninsula C

2:30pm – 2:45pm **Break**

2:45pm – 4:30pm **BLOCK TWO AFTERNOON SESSIONS**

Participants will attend one of the meetings hosted by the USOA chapters.

USOA Chapter Meetings

All are welcome. Chapter meetings include training, program updates and information sharing. Specialized chapters are organized within USOA to share experiences, resources and

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accomplishments. You do not need to be a member to attend. Please join us! Chapters include:
Children and Families & Education – (Location: Governor C)
Health and Wellness – (Location: Peninsula B)
Public Safety – (Location: Peninsula A)
Local Government – (Location: Peninsula C)
Federal Government – (Location: Mackinac BC)

5:00pm - 8:00pm **Lake Michigan Discovery Cruise**
Location: *Shuttle bus pickup at resort entrance* ***4:35pm – 5:05pm***
See more on **Discovery Cruises website**.

***Limited to 100 participants. Tickets sold separately on a first-come, first-served basis.

Thursday, September 3, 2026

7:50am – 9:50am **Breakfast**
Location: Governors C

8:30am – 10:15am **BLOCK ONE MORNING SESSION**

Plenary Session 3 – Be The Difference
Session Instructor(s): Gaelin Elmore - Gaelin Speaks LLC
Location: Governors C

10:15am – 10:30am **Break**

10:30am – 12:00pm **BLOCK TWO MORNING SESSIONS**

Participants will attend one of the following breakout sessions.

A) **Using Data to Drive Change**
Session Instructor(s): Michelle Lucarelli-Beltran - Los Angeles County Ombudsperson for Youth
Location: Tower A

B) **How to Deliver Trauma-Informed Ombuds Services to System-Impacted Youth**
Session Instructor(s): Ahmed Nemr - Office of Youth & Community Restoration
Location: Tower B

C) **Launching and Leading a New Oversight Body**

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Session Instructor(s): DeVaughn Ward - Connecticut Office of Correction Ombuds; Yvonne Briley-Wilson - Maryland Office of Correction Ombuds
Location: Governors C

12:00pm – 1:15pm **Lunch, USOA Annual Meeting & Member Awards**
Location: Governors C

1:15pm – 2:45pm **BLOCK ONE AFTERNOON SESSIONS**

Participants will attend one of the following breakout sessions.

A) Writing for Change: A hands-on workshop for writing impactful ombuds reports and products. PART 1
Session Instructor(s): Jordan Steffen – Office of the Colorado Child Protection Ombudsman
Location: Tower A

B) The Belonging Need
Session Instructor(s): Gaelin Elmore - Gaelin Speaks LLC
Location: Tower B

C) Measuring the Invisible: Meaningful Metrics for Ombuds Programs
Session Instructor(s): Billie Jo Garcia - Monterey County Housing and Community Development
Location: Governors C

2:45pm – 3:00pm **Break**

3:00pm – 4:30pm **BLOCK TWO AFTERNOON SESSIONS**

Participants will attend one of the following breakout sessions.

A) Writing for Change: A hands-on workshop for writing impactful ombuds reports and products. PART 2
Session Instructor(s): Jordan Steffen – Office of the Colorado Child Protection Ombudsman
Location: Tower A

B) What's Missing? Strategies for Measuring and Building Belonging
Session Instructor(s): Gaelin Elmore - Gaelin Speaks LLC

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Location: Tower B

C) **Core Social Media Skills for Busy Government Communicators**
Session Instructor(s): Ariana Donley – Government Social Media
Location: Governors C

6:00pm - 9:00pm **Networking Dinner**
Buffet dinner with DJ, DJ trivia, and 360-degree photobooth
Location: Plaza Tent

****Attendance is included in full conference registration fees. Guest tickets available for purchase*

Friday, September 4, 2026

7:50am – 9:50am **Breakfast**
Location: Governors C

8:30am – 9:00am **Closing day remarks**
Location: Governors C

9:00am – 10:30am **BLOCK ONE MORNING SESSIONS**

Participants will attend one of the following breakout sessions.

A) **What makes a Report a Good Ombuds Report?**
Session Instructor(s): Larry Fluharty - California Office of the Foster Care Ombudsperson
Location: Tower A

B) **Where Oversight Meets Impact: Creating Ripples to Address Criminalization of Mental Illness**
Session Instructor(s): Margaret Zadra - Minnesota Office of the Ombuds for Corrections, Keith Barber - Michigan Legislative Corrections Ombudsman, Lisa Harrison-Hadler - Minnesota Office of Ombudsman for Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities, and Yvonne Briley-Wilson - Maryland Office of the Correctional Ombudsman
Location: Tower B

C) **AI Topics for the Ombudsman**

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Session Instructor(s): Billy Jo Garcia – Monterey County Housing and Community Development
Location: Governors C

10:30am – 11:00am **Break for checkout & Boxed Lunch**

11:00am – 12:00pm **BLOCK TWO MORNING SESSIONS**

Participants will attend one of the following breakout sessions.

A) Best Practices for Sustainable Partnerships Between Ombudsman Offices and Community Organizations
Session Instructor(s): Lin Chao - Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman
Location: Tower A

B) Beyond Plain Language: Effective Communication for Impactful Ombuds Work
Session Instructor(s): Barb Damchik-Dykes - Minnesota Office of the Ombuds for Corrections, and Andrea Domaskin - Minnesota Office of the Ombuds for Corrections
Location: Tower B

12:00pm – 12:15pm **Conference Closing**

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