

COMPA CONFERENCE

FEBRUARY 22-25, 2026

DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

*Building Futures by Bridging Divides: Public Servants
Charting the Course for Tomorrow's Governance*

Hosted By: North Carolina Central University

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2025

In an era when declining public trust in government institutions and deepening societal divisions threaten effective governance, this conference equips public servants with essential tools to rebuild community cohesion and create more responsive, equitable governance. This year's conference theme, **"Building Futures by Bridging Divides: Public Servants Charting the Course for Tomorrow's Governance,"** reflects the critical role public servants play in navigating our increasingly complex and divided societal landscape. The conference serves as a vital platform for exploring innovative solutions, sharing best practices, and fostering collaborative approaches to public service excellence.

Conference Tracks:

Track 1: Emergency Management, Disaster Relief, and Resilience

Track 2: Bridging Divides: Federal Policy Changes and Local Implementation

Track 3: Boots on the Ground: Navigating Risk, Discretion, and Equity in Divided Times

Track 4: Nonprofits and the Private Sector as Bridge Builders in Tomorrow's Governance

Track 5: Civic Engagement and Advocacy: Preparing the Next Generation and Widening Access

Track 6: Professional Development for Students and Early Career Professionals

Track 7: Universal Access: Healthcare, Housing, and Workforce Development

Our seven conference tracks reflect the multifaceted challenges and opportunities facing today's public servants as they navigate complex political landscapes to build sustainable solutions for the future. COMPA invites you- practitioners, community leaders, academics, students, government partners- to participate in this international dialogue, and propose papers, workshops, round tables, and posters for the February 22-25 conference. The 2026 COMPA Program Committee welcomes submissions from members and nonmembers in the United States as well as from our international colleagues.



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COMPA 2026 CONFERENCE TRACKS

Track 1: Emergency Management, Disaster Relief, and Resilience

Track co-chairs: Jason Rivera and Sean McCandless

The frequency and magnitude of natural hazards are increasing throughout the world. As a result, the importance of understanding the challenges faced by public administrators in emergencies, in addition to the various organizations and personnel they interface with, is of growing importance. Moreover, the numerous ways in which public administrators and other public servants attend to enduring issues related to social vulnerability have profound impacts on the ways in which communities are able to recover from hazards. This track explores the multitude of issues that public administrators deal with in the context of emergencies and disaster management with the aim of enhancing our practices and policies for better public services in the future, especially concerning access, processes, quality, and outcomes.

Suggested topics for this track:

- Climate change
- Social vulnerability Quant and Qualitative Assessment
- Transparency, Accountability, and Procedural Justice
- Recovery and resilience
- Role of FEMA
- Intergovernmental, Interorganizational & Intersectoral Challenges
- Privatization
- Environmental Contamination and Justice
- Indigenous challenges
- International experiences
- AI and Emergency Management

Track 2: Bridging Divides: Federal Policy Changes and Local Implementation

Track co-chairs: Aaron Rollins and ClarLynda Williams-Devane

As the federal policy landscape continues to evolve in response to shifting political, demographic, and technological forces, the work of translating these changes into effective and equitable local action remains a complex and often contested endeavor. This track critically examines the intergovernmental dynamics that shape how federal policies are interpreted, adapted, and implemented at the local level, particularly in communities of color. This track aims to explore the role of public administrators as policy mediators, cultural interpreters, and equity advocates within a decentralized federal system. By grounding discussion in empirical research, case analysis, and theoretical inquiry, this track will surface strategies for closing the implementation gap and advancing community-centered governance.

Suggested topics for this track:

- Policy-community relations and the trust-building mechanisms necessary for effective governance.
- The role of cultural understanding in administering public services amid a diversifying populace and changing political ideologies.
- The implications of community oversight and accountability structures in ensuring equitable implementation.
- Local responses to immigration enforcement and their intersection with sanctuary policies and human rights frameworks.
- The evolving discourse around community policing, public safety, and justice reform.
- The ethical and practical considerations of using data and artificial intelligence in policy design, service delivery, and surveillance, with particular attention to bias and equity.



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Track 3: Boots on the Ground: Navigating Risk, Discretion, and Equity in Divided Times

Track co-chairs: Brittany Houston and Kareen Sweeting

From street-level bureaucrats and caseworkers to nonprofit staff and agency managers, public servants are increasingly tasked with upholding their missions amid deep political polarization, resource constraints, and shifting legal mandates. These professionals operate in discretionary gray zones where the line between compliance and compassion is rarely clear. As the stakes rise and scrutiny intensifies, so too do the emotional, ethical, and cognitive burdens of frontline work. This track explores how those on the front lines of service delivery interpret, resist, or rework policy under pressure. It welcomes papers and practitioner reflections that examine how broader political, organizational, and cultural forces shape everyday decision-making. Emphasis will be placed on strategies that preserve public service values, such as equity, justice, and psychological safety, even in hostile or volatile environments.

Suggested topics for this track:

- Representative bureaucracy and discretionary justice in frontline service
- Administrative burden, legitimacy, red tape, and moral injury in equity work
- Informal rule-bending, resistance, and workarounds as governance strategies
- The emotional, ethical, and cognitive burdens of frontline workers
- The politics of neutrality and nonpartisanship in contested domains (e.g., immigration, public health, education)
- Risk perception and management under uncertainty
- Discretion in contested domains (e.g., immigration, policing, education)
- Equity, bias, and structural inequality in frontline decision-making
- Leadership practices that support ethical discretion and psychological safety
- Organizational responses to anti-DEI legislation, including how agencies and nonprofits are preserving equity goals through alternative frameworks, values-driven implementation strategies, or quiet resistance
- Automation and AI in public management, including how predictive tools, algorithmic decision systems, or digital casework platforms are reshaping discretion and accountability

Track 4: Nonprofits and the Private Sector as Bridge Builders in Tomorrow's Governance

Track co-chairs: Teshanee Williams and Jessica Santiago

As the field of public service evolves to meet complex challenges, nonprofit organizations have emerged as essential partners in building inclusive, responsive, and resilient governance systems. By fostering collaboration, generating social capital, and strengthening trust between communities and government institutions, nonprofits play a key role in facilitating policy implementation and community-led change. This track examines the increasing role of nonprofits in promoting public service values through collaborative governance, co-production, stakeholder engagement, and how nonprofits and the private sector influence governance outcomes and contribute to community resilience. Special attention will be given to proposals that demonstrate how organizations can leverage AI to enhance service delivery and decision-making, and contribute to community resilience in an increasingly digital environment.

Suggested topics for this track:

- Nonprofit-government collaboration, co-governance, and stakeholder engagement
- Social capital and trust building between communities and the government
- Crisis response and community resilience
- Evaluating nonprofit leadership and performance
- Collaborative governance frameworks
- Public service values and nonprofit roles
- Navigating innovative financial streams
- Innovative Strategic Partnerships: Public, Private, Academic Partnerships



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Track 5: Civic Engagement and Advocacy: Preparing the Next Generation and Widening Access

Track co-chairs Eric Williams and Anthony Starke

Understanding how governments work and how to participate in shaping public policy is essential for a healthy, functioning democracy. This track invites proposals that explore how public servants, educators, students, and community leaders are helping people from all walks of life better understand civic processes and take part in democratic decision-making. This track welcomes contributions that reflect a wide range of experiences, strategies, and voices working to ensure that everyone has the tools and opportunity to be informed and involved in the future of governance. We are looking for sessions that highlight practical approaches to expanding access to civic education, breaking down barriers to participation, and engaging people at different life stages.

Suggested topics for the track:

- Community education efforts
- Mentorship programs
- Student transitions into the civil society and the public workforce
- Lessons learned from past initiatives
- New ways to connect people to public service in a changing world
- Innovative AI-driven tools to improve governance and civic education

Track 6: Professional Development for Students and Early Career Professionals

Track co-chairs Duchess Humphrey and S. Nicole Diggs

This dynamic track is designed specifically for students and early career professionals ready to make their mark in the public sector. Whether you're completing your degree, starting your first position, or navigating the early years of your career, this track provides essential tools, insights, and connections to accelerate your professional growth and maximize your impact in public service. Through interactive sessions, mentorship opportunities, and peer networking, participants will gain practical skills for career advancement while building lasting relationships with established professionals who understand the unique challenges and opportunities facing emerging leaders in today's public sector landscape.

Suggested topics for this track:

- Mentorship, Career Navigation, and Strategy: Examine the role of mentorship in fostering career development and facilitating effective navigation of public sector opportunities.
- Building Networks and Professional Relationships: Identify evidence-based practices to leverage networks for policy influence, collaborative initiatives, and career progression, regardless of being new to the field or assuming leadership responsibilities.
- Enhancing Essential Professional Skill Sets: Enhancing skills set to enter professional job positions such as strategic communication, ethical leadership, policy analysis, and stakeholder engagement.
- Leadership Development: Exploring frameworks for cultivating leadership capacities within public sector organizations.
- Work-Life Integration: Address the challenges associated with maintaining personal well-being amidst the changing demands of the public sector and diverse expectations of the public interest.



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Track 7: Universal Access: Healthcare, Housing, Workforce Development

Track co-chairs: Christal Hamilton and Cornell P. Wright

Universal access represents the fundamental principles that all individuals, regardless of income, race, geography, or other barriers, have equitable opportunities to access essential services that promote human dignity and community well-being. Achieving this requires intentional policy design, resource allocation, and service delivery models that treat healthcare, housing, and employment as rights rather than privileges. This track explores how public servants can bridge silos to create comprehensive solutions addressing these foundational needs. Through panels, workshops, and policy discussions, attendees will examine systemic barriers, community-driven solutions, and cross-sector strategies that improve population health, housing justice, economic mobility, and social stability. Participants will explore innovative funding mechanisms and collaborative approaches that integrate services and elevate the lived experiences of under-resourced communities.

Suggested topics for this track:

- Healthcare equity, access, and health impact
- Affordable housing policy design and implementation
- Equity centered community and economic development
- Future of work and adaptive workforce strategies
- Homelessness prevention and housing-first initiatives
- Skills-based training programs and partnerships
- Policies addressing income inequality
- Mental health
- Redistributive policies
- Innovative technology (AI and Machine learning)
- Shift in equity language in community health and housing (i.e., Social Determinants of Health to Health Related Social Needs)

Student Submissions

We encourage the participation of master's and doctoral students in panels, workshops, and poster presentations. Poster presentations and workshops are encouraged in all tracks.

A conference travel grant is available for full-time students who attend the Conference. The grant is for student travel to present scholarly work at the conference. The maximum funding provided by the grant is \$500. This grant is available for full-time graduate or undergraduate students studying public policy, public affairs, or public administration. Up to ten (10) student travel grants will be awarded, but this is dependent on philanthropic support.



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CALL FOR PROPOSALS

[Submit Proposals Here](#)

In addition to individual paper proposals, the committee encourages the submission of full-panel submissions, roundtables, interactive workshops, and poster presentations. Descriptions of each are provided below. All proposals should provide information on the overall theme and indicate how it connects to a specific conference track.

Five types of proposals may be submitted:

1. **Full panel:** 3-4 papers/presentations and a convenor, built around a theme that addresses one of the tracks. The panel description should include all presentation titles and names, and email addresses of all panelists.
2. **Roundtable:** A focused discussion among 3-4 speakers with a facilitator, around a theme that aligns with a track. Roundtables are meant to engage challenging topics and themes with multiple perspectives in order to foster insight on the complexity of a topic and to find areas of alignment. The theme of the discussion and the purpose of the facilitated conversation should be clear in the description.
3. **Workshop or engaged learning session:** Workshops are interactive, providing opportunities for hands-on learning and application. A facilitator or instructor typically makes the proposal. The proposal should include the purpose and method of the workshop, participants involved in delivering the workshop, and the time required.
4. **Individual paper:** Papers focus on case studies, original research, applications, or thought leadership. A paper can be proposed alone or as part of a proposed panel.
5. **Poster Presentation:** Poster presentations are a visual presentation of research or a professional idea, model, initiative, or case.

Submission Guidelines

Presenter(s) name, institutional affiliation, address, email address, and contact number.

Proposed conference track.

Type of proposal (individual paper/presentation, full panel, roundtable, workshop, poster).

Proposal Title.

- **Abstract:** A brief abstract (250 words or less) that includes both of the following: a) a short description of the proposal; and b) a short statement on how the proposal addresses the focus in the call for proposals for building futures by bridging divides.



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Program Committee

Co-Chairs

ClarLynda Williams-Devane
COMPA Vice-President

Jessica Santiago
COMPA Region 1 Representative

Program Committee Members

1. Christal Hamilton, UConn School of Public Policy
2. Brittany Houston, University of Massachusetts Amherst
3. Duchess Humphrey, Tarrant County Administrator's Office
4. Sean McCandless, University of Texas at Dallas
5. Jason Rivera, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY
6. Aaron Rollins, University of Louisville
7. Diana Schreiber, City of Durham
8. Anthony Starke, Virginia Commonwealth University
9. Karen Sweeting, University of Rhode Island
10. Eric Williams, South Carolina State University
11. Teshanee Williams, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
12. Cornell Wright, General Dynamics Information Technology

If you have any questions/concerns, please contact
COMPA2026program@gmail.com



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CONFERENCE REGISTRATION

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COMPA 2026	Students	Members	Non-Members	Rate Deadlines
Launch Registration	\$125.00	\$195.00	\$425.00	September 15- September 30, 2025
Early Bird Registration	\$135.00	\$225.00	\$435.00	October 1- October 31, 2025
Regular Registration	\$155.00	\$255.00	\$455.00	November 1- December 31, 2025
Late Registration	\$175.00	\$285.00	\$485.00	January 1- February 21, 2026
Onsite Registration	\$195.00	\$455.00	\$525.00	February 22 -25, 2026

[Click here to register](#)



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