BUILDING for TOMORROW
Leadership Development for PA's Conservation Districts

2026 Management Summit Agenda

October 27-29, Wyndham Garden Conference Center State College

Tuesday October 27 : New Manager Training PreCon

8:00am – 9:00am **Networking**

9:00am – 10:00am **Welcome & Icebreakers**
Introduction to New Manager Training Unit 2: District Operations
Matt Miller, Leadership Development Program Manager, PACD
Executive Roles & Functions: Policy, Performance, Planning

10:00am – 12:00pm **HR Fundamentals Part 1: Practical People Management**
Kristen Evans, President & CEO, HR Influenced
Overview of human resources functions within small organizations with a focus on manager roles and responsibilities throughout the employee lifecycle

12:00pm – 1:00pm **Lunch**

1:00pm – 3:00pm **HR Fundamentals Part 2: Performance & Practical Leadership**
Kristen Evans, President & CEO, HR Influenced
Overview of performance management practices including setting clear expectations, providing effective feedback, addressing performance challenges, transitioning from peer to manager, and team accountability

3:00pm – 3:15pm **Break**

3:15pm – 4:15pm	**Operational Topics Breakout Tables** New managers and experienced managers will breakout (county vs. independent districts) to workshop operational challenges and management support needs.
5:30pm – 6:30pm	**Dinner (Mountainview Ballroom West)**

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Wednesday October 28 : Management Summit Day 1

8:00am – 9:00am **District Managers Working Breakfast**
Private breakfast for District Managers & Executive Directors

9:00am – 10:00am **Networking**

10:00am – 10:45am **Welcome & Opening Remarks**
The Honorable Russell Redding, Secretary Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture and Marty Qually, Executive Secretary, Pennsylvania Conservation Commission

10:45am – 11:00am **Meet the New Managers**

11:00am – 11:45am **AI & Conservation District Management**
Matt Miller, Leadership Development Program Manager, PACD

- Current AI adoption & outlook for districts
- Basics of prompting and simple demonstrations
- Best practices & policy

11:45am – 12:00pm **Break**

12:00pm – 1:00pm **Working Lunch: AI Policy & Leadership**
Attendees will be provided with discussion prompts for table discussion on AI policy, responsible use, and organizational leadership.

1:00pm – 1:15pm **Debrief: AI Policy & Leadership**

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1:15pm – 3:15pm

Finding Your Voice: Inspiration, Persuasion, and Influence

Dr. Stephany Santos, Ph.D., Associate Professor in Residence in Biomedical Engineering & Executive Director and Endowed Chair of the Vergnano Institute for Impact, University of Connecticut

Why do some messages motivate people while others are ignored? Drawing on cognitive science, psychology, and the principles of effective storytelling, this session explores how audiences form initial reactions, process information, and decide whether to act. Participants will examine the influence of biases, identity, social norms, and personal motivations on communication, then learn how to intentionally frame presentations that connect emotionally, communicate purpose, and inspire meaningful action.

Manager Panel: Collective & Individual Voices

Facilitated panel discussion on using our collective and individual voices to be more effective & engaged as advocates, partners, and leaders in advancing conservation priorities, strengthening relationships, and increasing public understanding of the work we do.

3:15pm – 4:00pm

Board Development as Civic Engagement

Matt Miller, Leadership Development Program Manager, PACD

A brief presentation on voluntary service theories will frame a manager-led discussion on working with nominating organizations and county governments, associate directors, and board succession planning.

4:00pm – 4:15pm

2027 Manager Development Initiative Preview

Preview of 2027 Manager Development programming, including the Management in Practice February workshop, DiSC/EQ and CliftonStrengths for Managers assessments, and the Leadership in Practice 2027 Manager Book Club.

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Thursday October 29 : Summit Day 2

8:00am – 8:30am **Video: Generations Yet to Come**
Documentary on the PA Environmental Rights Amendment.

8:30am – 9:30am **DEP Partner Updates**
Carl DeLuca, Director & Kate Bresaw, Program Manager, Bureau Watershed Restoration & Nonpoint Source Management, DEP

9:30am – 10:00am **SCC Staffing Application Overview**
Jaci Kerstetter, Water Program Specialist, Bureau of Watershed Restoration and Nonpoint Source Management, DEP
An overview of salary & benefits tracking and how districts are using reports.

10:00am – 10:15am **Break**

10:15am – 11:00am **Workforce Trends & Retention**
Laura Stover, SHRM-SCP, SPHR, Director of HR Advisory Services, SEK
Overview of current workforce and compensation trends followed by a discussion on recruitment and retention strategies for districts.

11:00am – 12:00pm **Manager-Led Discussion Block:**
Succession Planning for Staff
Strategies for turnover, retention, and talent development
Other Topics TBD

12:00pm – 12:45pm **Lunch**

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12:45pm – 2:45pm **New Manager Training: District Funding & Financial Management**

Jaci Kerstetter, Water Program Specialist, and Karen Books, Environmental Group Manager, Bureau of Watershed Restoration and Nonpoint Source Management, DEP

- District Funding Sources
- Annual Budgets
- Audit Requirements & Guidelines, Investment Policy