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**Association of Public Pension Fund Auditors
("APPFA")
Professional Development Conference**

18.2 CPE Hours

April 27 to 30, 2026

Columbus, Ohio

**Courtyard by Marriott Columbus OSU
780 Yard St, Columbus, OH, 43212**

Spring 2026 Conference Agenda

Date	Event	Location
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Monday, April 27

5:30 PM – 7:30 PM	*Welcome Reception	Grandview Ballroom/ Courtyard Patio
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Tuesday, April 28

7:00 AM – 8:30 AM	*Breakfast and Networking at OPERS	OPERS
8:30 AM – 8:40 AM	*1a. Opening Remarks Nicki Russell, CPA, CIA, MPA, Chief Auditor, MOSERS (APPFA President)	
8:40 AM – 9:40 AM	1b. Welcome to OPERS/OPERS Benefits Overview Karen Carraher, Executive Director, OPERS Allen Foster, Deputy Executive Director – Benefits Administration, OPERS	
9:50 AM – 10:50 AM	^1c. IT Security Presentation Don Clark, Assistant Director – Security and Networking, OPERS	
10:50 AM – 11:00 AM	* Networking Break (10-minutes)	
11:00 AM – 12:00 PM	1d. Protecting Members and Retirees: Fraud Program Insights Tonya Brown, Deputy Executive Director – Governance Office, OPERS	
12:00 PM – 1:00 PM	*Lunch and Networking (1-hour)	OPERS
1:00 PM – 2:30 PM	1e. Roll Call of the States Alex McDowell, CIA, CISA, CRISC, OCERS (APPFA Vice President and Programs Committee, Chair)	
2:40 PM – 3:40 PM	^1f. Strategic Planning in Action: Aligning Purpose, Priorities and Public Impact Alyncia M. Bowen, Ph.D., Dean of the Ross College of Business and the College of Health and Public Administration, Franklin University	
3:40 PM – 4:40 PM	1g. Break & OPERS Tour	
6:00 PM – 9:00 PM	*Group Dinner (see page 14)	The Little Grand Market



Spring 2026 Conference Agenda

Date	Event	Location
Wednesday, April 29		
7:00 AM – 8:00 AM	*Breakfast and Networking	Scioto Room
8:00 AM – 8:10 AM	*2a. APPFA Housekeeping Caroline Stinziano, CPA, Internal Audit Director, OPERS (<i>APPFA Bylaws and Policies Committee</i>)	Grandview Ballroom
8:10 AM – 9:50 AM	2b. Columbus Zoo Case Study Matthew T. Klapheke, CFE, Senior Forensic Audit Manager, Ohio State Auditor of State Special Investigations Unit Marrisa C. Gibson, Fraud Investigator Ohio State Auditor of State Special Investigations Unit	
9:50 AM – 10:05 AM	* Networking Break (15-minutes)	
10:05 AM – 11:05 AM	2c. Ethics Law: Promoting Ethics, Protecting the Public Susan Willeke, Training & Communications Manager The Ohio Ethics Commission	
11:15 AM – 12:15 PM	^2d. Audit Analytics Strategy Valerie Zappia, Manager, Internal Audit Analytics, Victoria’s Secret & Co.	
12:15 PM – 1:15PM	*Lunch and Networking (1-hour)	Scioto Room
1:15 PM – 2:15 PM	2e. CoPilot/AI Valerie Zappia, Manager, Internal Audit Analytics, Victoria’s Secret & Co.	Grandview Ballroom
2:25 PM – 3:25 PM	^2f. Investment Auditing Barb Davison, CEO, Investment Training and Consulting Institute	
3:25 PM – 3:40 PM	*Networking Break with Snacks and Refreshments (15-minutes)	
3:40 PM – 4:40 PM	2g. Innovation in Internal Audit Bailey Kahl-Wu, CPA, Manager, Risk & Accounting Advisory Services Plante Moran	
4:45 PM – 5:45 PM	*APPFA Board Meeting Dinner is on your own, enjoy some time exploring Columbus!	



Spring 2026 Conference Agenda

Date	Event	Location
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Thursday, April 30

7:00 AM – 8:00 AM	*Breakfast and Networking	Scioto Room
8:00 AM – 8:10 AM	*3a. APPFA Housekeeping & Membership Committee Update Kristy Scott, Principal Auditor – Governance & Program Administration, VRS (<i>APPFA Membership Committee, Chairwoman</i>)	Grandview Ballroom
8:10 AM – 9:10 AM	3b. IIA Topical Requirements and the Global IIA Standards Andy Cook, CIA, Director of Professional Guidance for Financial Services, IIA	
9:10 AM – 9:25 AM	* Networking Break (15-minutes)	
9:25 AM – 10:25 AM	3c. Internal Audit, Becoming a Trusted Advisor Jessie Austin, GRC Senior Solutions Consultant, Workiva Kevin Wang, CPA, Solutions Sales Executive, Workiva	
10:35 AM – 11:35 AM	^3d. Strategic Planning for Internal Audit: Aligning Vision, Value, and Stakeholders Panel Discussion by the APPFA Best Practices Committee	
11:35 AM – 11:50 AM	*Conference Closing	

***Items marked with an * do not qualify for CPE.**
^Times have been adjusted to allow for speaker transitions.

APPFA will provide a link via email for the Conference APP (Eventsential) to registered attendees closer to the conference date. The APP will include session descriptions, learning objectives, speaker information, session surveys, overall conference survey, and other relevant information.



More information about the Conference APP
is on page 13 of this brochure.



****Event and Session Information****

The Conference APP includes the speaker information.

Monday, April 27

Welcome Reception, 5:30 – 7:30 PM

Catch up and network with pension members and colleagues at the welcome reception at the Grand Event Center (connected to the hotel) in the Grandview Ballroom. We can also mingle on the patio (pending weather conditions.)

**This event does not qualify for CPE.*

Tuesday, April 28

For the first time ever, our conference will feature a special day hosted at OPERS office. Complimentary buses will run from the hotel to OPERS at staggered times for your convenience. If you happen to miss a bus, don't worry, the hotel offers a limited shuttle service as well.

The day's sessions will take place in the Neil V. Toth Auditorium, and all attendees will enjoy an OPERS facility tour for a behind-the-scenes look at our day-to-day operations. We look forward to welcoming you!

1a. Opening Remarks, 8:30 – 8:40 AM

Nicki Russell, CIA, CPA, MPA, Chief Auditor, MOSERS (APPFA President)

The APPFA President will officially start the conference. Attendees will be reminded of conference or event information, announcements, encouraged to sign into each session to get CPE (via the Conference APP), and to complete the session surveys. Additional information about the Conference APP will be shared with attendees. One highlight of the Conference APP is the "Top Contributor Board". This is an interactive experience through the APP to help attendees get the most out of the conference. This is a way to share your thoughts and experiences during the conference.

**This session does not qualify for CPE.*

1b. Welcome to Ohio/OPERS Benefits Overview, 8:40 AM – 9:40 AM

Karen Carraher, Executive Director, OPERS

Allen Foster, Deputy Executive Director, Benefits Administration, OPERS

This session will provide attendees with a warm welcome to Columbus, Ohio. Karen Carraher and Allen Foster will present history and highlights about Ohio Public Employees Retirement System. Attendees will take away industry knowledge and learn more about the goals of the pension system.

Specialized Knowledge

1c. IT Security, 9:50 AM – 10:50 AM



APPFA Professional Development Conference, Spring 2026, Columbus, Ohio

Don Clark, Assistant Director, Security and Networking, OPERS

Join us for an interesting and engaging presentation with the OPERS Security and Networking Assistant Director, Don Clark. The discussion will include topics such as an overview of OPERS IT Security structure, use of third parties to support security efforts, implementation of policies and framework assessments, and other hot topics. *Information Technology*

1d. Protecting Members and Retirees: Fraud Program Insights, 11:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Tonya Brown, Deputy Executive Director, Governance Office, OPERS

Fraud prevention is a growing challenge for public sector retirement systems, requiring constant innovation and vigilance. In this session, discover real-world insights from a pension system's perspective, focusing on the evolution of a fraud program, the implementation of regular report monitoring and the redesign of online services to better safeguard participants. We will also discuss current trends and practical implementation lessons.

This session is tailored for professionals seeking to deepen their expertise in fraud prevention and contribute to the integrity and trust of public sector retirement systems.

After attending this session, you will be able to:

- Understand the importance of making fraud monitoring a top organizational priority
- Participate more effectively in your organization's fraud preparedness efforts
- Identify the three best practices for fraud controls, data monitoring to prevent fraud and fraud program implementation
 - Discuss current fraud trends and potential preventive measures within public retirement systems. *Auditing (Governmental)*

1e. Roll Call of the States, 1:00 PM – 2:30 PM

Alex McDowell, CIA, CISA, CRISC, Senior Internal Auditor, OCERS (APPFA Vice-President and Programs Committee Chair)

**Individuals who are attending the conference and are non-members
or do not have internal audit responsibilities
should not attend the "Roll Call of the States" session.**

Prior to the conference each attending system completed a Roll Call of the States survey. A representative from each participating organization (i.e., System) will share highlights from their respective system. In addition, all the staff from that System will participate by way of introductions. This is a way for other attendees to know which System you represent and helps with networking and follow up if attendees have questions about any of the content shared. Attendees will take away information about audit topics and prompt networking by identifying peers working on similar projects or facing similar challenges. There will be no roundtable discussions with this session.

Auditing (Governmental)

1f. Strategic Planning in Action: Aligning Purpose, Priorities, and Public Impact, 2:40 PM – 3:40 PM



APPFA Professional Development Conference, Spring 2026, Columbus, Ohio

Alyncia M. Bowen, Ph. D., Franklin University, Dean of the Ross College and the College of Health and Public Administration, Franklin University

This interactive workshop will equip the participants with a practical and adaptable approach to strategic planning that moves beyond static plans and into actionable decision-making. Participants will explore how to clarify organizational purpose, identify strategic priorities, and align resources to achieve measurable public impact. The session emphasizes strategic thinking over strategic documents, helping leaders navigate complexity, constraints, and competing priorities while staying mission-focused and outcomes-driven.

Auditing (Governmental)

1g. Break & OPERS Tour 3:40 PM – 4:40 PM

Enjoy a short networking break followed by a guided tour of the OPERS building. Attendees will have the opportunity to explore the facility, learn more about OPERS operations, and get a behind-the-scenes look at the workspace that supports the system's mission and day-to-day activities.

**This event does not qualify for CPE.*

Group Dinner, 6:00 PM – 9:00 PM

This is an off-site networking event and dinner at The Little Grand Market. Attendees will meet in the lobby of the hotel and transportation will be provided. See page 16 for additional information about this exciting, one-of-a-kind event!

**This event does not qualify for CPE.*

Wednesday, April 29

2a. APPFA Housekeeping, 8:00 AM – 8:10 AM

Caroline Stinziano, CPA, Internal Audit Director, OPERS (APPFA Bylaws and Policies Committee)

Attendees will receive an update on any potential changes in APPFA Bylaws and Policies. They will be reminded of conference or event information, announcements, encouragement to sign into each session to get CPE, to complete the session surveys, and to complete the conference survey.

**This session does not qualify for CPE.*

2b. Columbus Zoo Case Study, 8:10 AM – 9:50 AM

**Mathew T. Klapheke, CFE, Senior Forensic Audit Manager, Ohio Auditor of State Special Investigations Unit
Marissa C. Gibson, Fraud Investigator, Ohio Auditor of State Special Investigations Unit**

A criminal enterprise hijacked the purse strings of the Columbus Zoo. We will examine multiple areas of fraud committed by Zoo Executives and how working in concert they covered their fraud for nearly a decade. We will examine how this massive fraud motivated by greed resulted in four men winding up behind bars and one on supervised probation. *Behavioral Ethics.*

2c. Ethics Law: Promoting Ethics, Protecting the Public, 10:05 AM – 11:05 AM

Susan Willeke, Training & Communications Manager, The Ohio Ethics Commission



This engaging and interactive discussion explores the ongoing values and protections of ethics laws and how they can apply to both the public and private sectors. Join us as we dissect conflicts of interest, gift restrictions, nepotism, and much more!

Objectives:

- Identify potential conflicts of interest and understand appropriate and legal response
- Understand gift restrictions for those in public service or when interacting with public officials or public employees.
- Recognize potential public contract and representation violations when public officials have connections with private organizations.
- Grasp post-employment requirements when leaving public service or hiring former public servants.
- Learn about general assistance available from ethics commissions to understand and comply with the law. *Behavioral Ethics*

2d. Audit Analytics Strategy, 11:15 AM – 12:15 PM

Valerie Zappia, Manager, Internal Audit Analytics, Victoria's Secret & Co.

The session is designed to kickstart an internal audit group in audit analytics and help them get organized. We will explore potential team structures, training and development, analytics tools, integration into audit processes, and more. By the end of the session, participants will have numerous examples of audit analytics projects to delve into and gain insights on how to stay updated with ongoing trends. *Auditing (Governmental)*

2e. CoPilot/AI, 1:15 PM – 2:15 PM

Valerie Zappia, Manager, Internal Audit Analytics, Victoria's Secret & Co.

This session provides a practical overview of how Copilot and other AI tools can streamline everyday work through content generation, data analysis, task automation, and secure enterprise integration. Attendees will learn the differences between Copilot Chat, embedded Copilot, and AI agents, along with real world use cases and clear guidance on writing effective prompts. The session highlights actionable ways to incorporate AI into daily workflows to improve efficiency, insight, and productivity. *Auditing (Governmental)*

2f. Investment Auditing, 2:25 PM – 3:25 PM

Barb Davison, CEO, Investment Training and Consulting Institute

Understanding and Auditing Investment activities - In this session you will gain a basic understanding of investment and derivative terminology, the strategies entered by portfolio managers/investment managers/traders, and the core processes used in risk management, back-office operations, and accounting. *Auditing (Governmental)*

2g. Innovation in Internal Audit, 3:40 PM – 4:40 PM

Bailey Kahl-Wu, CPA, Manager - Risk & Accounting Advisory Services, Plante Moran



This session explores how internal audit teams can embrace innovation to deliver greater strategic value, enhance efficiency, and proactively manage emerging risks. Discover how internal audit teams are leveraging data analytics, machine learning, generative AI, and more to transform their approach. The session will also highlight how a culture of innovation within internal audit can foster continuous improvement and stronger alignment with organizational goals. *Auditing (Governmental)*

APPFA Board Meeting, 4:45 PM – 5:45 PM

Dinner is on your own!

Note: The hotel does offer a small onsite shuttle that you can utilize for your dinner destination, and there are also restaurants within walking distance

Thursday, April 30

3a. APPFA Housekeeping and Membership Committee Updates, 8:00 AM – 8:10 AM

Kristy Scott, Principal Auditor – Governance & Program Administration, VRS (APPFA Membership Committee, Chairwoman)

We will hear updates and/or reminders from the Membership Committee. Attendees will be reminded of conference or event information, announcements, encouragement to sign into each session to get CPE, to complete the session surveys, and to complete the conference survey.

**This session does not qualify for CPE.*

3b. IIA Topical Requirements and the Global IIA Standards, 8:10 AM – 9:10 AM

Andy Cook, CIA, Director of Professional Guidance for Financial Services, IIA

This presentation will review newly released IIA Topical Requirements, new Guidance and Tools, and critical components of the Global Internal Audit Standards to keep in mind when conducting both internal and external quality assessments. An open dialogue on these current IIA activities as well as plans for future releases will be incorporated into the discussion. *Auditing (Governmental)*

3c. Internal Audit, Becoming a Trusted Advisor, 9:25 AM – 10:25 AM

Jessie Austin, GRC Senior Solutions Consultant, Workiva

Kevin Wang, CPA, Solutions Sales Executive, Workiva

Today, organizations face an abundance of challenges: a tumultuous regulatory and political environment, economic uncertainties, supply chain disruptions, and so many more. Boards of directors and executive teams are scrambling to understand the potential impacts of changes and adjust their plans to be resilient in the face of so much turmoil.

Concurrently, the IIA is challenging internal auditors to be trusted advisors rather than corporate cops in their organizations while Audit committees and management teams are raising the bar on internal audit teams to “do more with less” and “add greater value to the organization” in addition to completing the required compliance activities.



Learning Objectives: At the end of this session, you will be able to demonstrate how to execute compliance and other audits differently to identify value and establish trust, develop capabilities across your audit team to move beyond compliance to trusted advisor and apply new practices to increase your organizational impact and “earn a seat at the table” *Auditing (Governmental)*

3d. Strategic Planning for Internal Audit: Aligning Vision, Value, & Stakeholders, 10:35 AM – 11:35 AM
Panel Discussion by the Best Practices Committee

The new IIA Global Internal Audit Standards elevate strategy from a “nice-to-have” to a core mandate for Chief Audit Executives. In this energetic, practical panel, three seasoned CAEs from U.S. public pension systems open the black box on how they built—and continuously refine—Internal Audit strategies that clearly support enterprise goals, earn buy in from boards and executives, and incorporate the voice of key stakeholders across the organization. You’ll hear how each leader translated organizational priorities into IA goals and portfolios, balanced assurance and advisory work, set measurable outcomes, and created a cadence for periodic review with the board and senior management. Expect candid lessons learned: templates that worked (and those that didn’t), approaches to stakeholder engagement, metrics that show impact, and ways to keep the strategy adaptive as risks evolve. Walk away with a repeatable blueprint you can tailor immediately to your own Internal Audit function—plus ideas to strengthen alignment, accountability, and value delivery in your organization. *Auditing (Governmental)*

Key Takeaways

- A step-by-step process for developing an Internal Audit strategy and keeping it current
- Techniques to align IA priorities with organizational strategic objectives
- Practical methods for stakeholder mapping, engagement, and feedback loops
- Measures and dashboards that demonstrate value to the board and senior leadership
- Pitfalls to avoid

3e. Conference Closing, 11:35 AM – 11:50 AM

Alex McDowell, CIA, CISA, CRISC, Senior Internal Auditor, OCERS (*APPFA Vice-President and Programs Committee Chair*)

The conference will conclude and any questions about the conference, CPE, or other APPFA topics. A final reminder will be announced to complete the conference session surveys and the overall conference survey.

Spring 2026 Conference Registration Information

Conference Registration will be open until March 30, 2026. The board-approved conference registration fee is \$550 per person, and it must be received by March 30, 2026 to reserve your place at the conference. The conference registration fee helps pay for the conference room, conference food,



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refreshments, and audio and visual services. We strive to provide a low-cost conference with a high-quality line of speakers.

The registration fee includes electronic materials, access to the conference APP, welcome reception, two lunches, two afternoon snack breaks, refreshments during the entire conference, a group dinner, 18.2 hours of CPE, and the opportunity to expand your knowledge and network with peers.

**** IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT CONFERENCE REGISTRATION ~ PLEASE READ ****

Registration for this conference will be made via our website. **The “conference registration” should be completed by the primary representative of your organization.** NOTE: After the “conference registration” is complete, **all individuals registered for the conference will receive an email** with a mandatory registration link, which will allow for their individual conference choice, called the “*event and meal registration.*” The “*events and meal registration*” allows each attendee to inform conference planners of their attendance at events and provide any dietary restrictions so that APPFA can give this information to the catering services. After completing each registration, an invoice will be generated with instructions for payment (if applicable).

Primary Representatives: Please use the conference registration link to register the staff that will be attending from your organization.

Link: https://appfa.memberclicks.net/conf_reg_ohio_sp26

Location and Hotel Information



APPFA Professional Development Conference, Spring 2026, Columbus, Ohio

We are so excited to welcome you all to this year's APPFA conference in the heart of the Midwest in Columbus, Ohio. Columbus is a vibrant, fast-growing city that is home to the state capital and home to The Ohio State University. The city offers a dynamic mix of modern architecture, walkable neighborhoods, and a thriving arts and culinary scene. Filled with world-class museums, professional sports, beautiful parks and a diverse dining landscape, Columbus is a fantastic, central location known for being friendly and accessible to all.



The conference room rate is \$159 plus applicable taxes. Reservations may be made by calling the hotel directly at 888-797-1886 or using the hotel reservations link below. The conference rate is available from April 24, 2026 through May 2, 2026. These rates are subject to availability. **Please make your registration by Monday, April 6, 2026 to receive the group rate.** After this date or when the group block is full, the reservations will be subject to the prevailing rates and availability.

[Book your group rate for APPFA April 2026 Conference Room Block](#)

Note: APPFA has committed to a specific number of guest rooms. We **strongly encourage** you to book your guest room through the APPFA's block of group rooms. Once the room block is filled, the conference room rate may not be available. The [hotel website](#) includes information on the hotel amenities, room features, as well as nearby attractions.

Transportation

John Glenn Columbus International Airport is the primary airport that provides airfare transportation. The hotel is approximately 8.1 miles from the airport. Attendees must provide their transportation from the airport to the hotel. There is complimentary self-parking on site.

About Your Sponsors and Continuing Professional Education

The APPFA Professional Development Conference is a group-live conference designed to further enhance participants' auditing skills and provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and concepts.



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Attendees should have a basic knowledge of accounting and auditing procedures, practices, and theory. There is no experience requirement, and no advance preparation is needed. APPFA members that are currently working in internal audit, compliance, and/or risk management are the individuals that should attend. See Table 1 for more information.

Attendees will receive an attendance certificate via email following the completion of this conference. We anticipate issuing the conference certificate via email approximately one month after the conference ends. Auditing and accounting professionals may qualify for Continuing Professional Education (CPE) credits by attending this conference, which is designed to comply with the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants' Statement on CPE Standards. The number of CPE is based on each attendee using the Conference APP (see next section) and electronically checking into each conference session. If your CPE certification is incorrect then attendees should contact Kurt Petrie, APPFA secretary, at kurt.petrie@etf.wi.gov.

APPFA is registered with the National Association of State Boards of Accountancy (NASBA), as a sponsor of continuing professional education on the National Registry of CPE Sponsors. State boards of accountancy have final authority on the acceptance of individual courses for CPE credit. Complaints regarding registered sponsors may be addressed to the National Registry of CPE Sponsors through their website: www.nasbaregistry.org.

Your attendance will enable you to expand your internal audit knowledge and apply what you learn to your current role. Upon completion of the conference, participants will be able to:

- Recognize how pension leaders have overcome challenges.
- Identify what other pension systems are going through and determine contrasts and similarities and apply that to future audit planning.
- Understand the impact of new and emerging technologies on audit practice and system implementations.
- Understand emerging issues in the internal audit field.
- Take information from peers in networking sessions to gain a greater understanding of leading practices and take your career to the next level.

Table 1: CPE-related summary information for this conference as it relates to all sessions is listed below.



Table 1: CPE Summary Information

Criteria	Description
Delivery:	Group Live – All sessions include a question-and-answer session.



CPE Credits:	18.2
Education or Experience Prerequisites (Who Should Attend):	None, public pension fund auditors at all levels are encouraged to attend.
Level of Knowledge:	Overview – Basic.
Advance Prerequisites:	None.
NASBA Fields of Study:	Auditing (Governmental), Behavioral Ethics, Information Technology, and Specialized Knowledge.

Conference APP

The Conference APP was referenced earlier in this brochure. This section will explain just a bit more. The Rdmobile/Eventsential APP will be used during the conference. This app can be found in the Apple App Store, Google Play Store, and on your Windows laptop through a link supplied prior to the conference.

The email you provide with your APPFA registration will be the same email used to link your account with the Rdmobile/Eventsential app. All attendees must have an active Rdmobile/Eventsential app account and be logged in during the conference event to complete check-ins and access APPFA materials. When signing up or logging in, the Rdmobile/Eventsential account might ask you to verify your identity from the APPFA registration email account. **If you will not have access to that email address at the conference, be sure you sign into your Rdmobile/Eventsential APP prior to leaving for the conference to ensure you will have access!**

Being logged in to the Rdmobile/Eventsential account allows your data and check-ins to be tracked and reported to APPFA for CPE credits. This information is required by AICPA to verify your attendance and disbursed CPEs. **If you are not logged in, your check-ins and attendance will not be reported.**

A paper sign-in sheet will also be available at the conference should an attendee experience technical difficulty during the conference. If technical difficulty occurs, then the attendee should notify Matt Priestas, APPFA webmaster at webmaster@appfa.org.

Complaint and/or Refund Policy

Information on how to submit a complaint or request a conference refund is included on the [APPFA website](#). Refunds are available if a written cancellation notice is received 20 days before the conference. Refunds will not be issued after that date.

Other Information



Monday Evening Welcome Reception

We will gather on Monday evening from 5:30 to 7:30 PM at the Grandview Ballroom for the welcome reception. If weather permits, we will also have access to the Courtyard Patio. Please attend the reception to network with your colleagues. Light appetizers and refreshments will be provided.



Tuesday Evening Group Dinner

Our group dinner will take place at The [Little Grand Market](https://thelittlegrandmarket.com/eat/), a vibrant food hall and community gathering spot featuring ten chef-driven vendor stalls and a wide variety of cuisines from Vietnamese and Cuban to pizza and burgers, along with a coffee shop and two full-service bars.

Our group will gather in the upstairs event space, which features a spacious patio with scenic city views, which is the perfect backdrop for mingling, relaxing, and enjoying the experience together. Appetizers will be served. Each attendee will receive a \$25 food voucher to use at any of the vendors, along with drink tickets for use at the event-space bar. This flexible, choose-your-own-dinner format lets you explore a variety of flavors at your own pace and build a meal that fits your tastes.

Take a sneak peek at the menu: <https://thelittlegrandmarket.com/eat/>

Guests

Those of you traveling with friends and family are welcome to bring your guests to any of the social activities planned during the conference at the rate noted below. Tuesday lunch for guests is on their own.

- Monday evening reception (no charge)
- Breakfasts Wednesday and Thursday (\$20 per meal)
- Group lunch on Wednesday (\$20 per meal)
- Group dinner on Tuesday (\$50 per guest)

Attire

Informal Smart Casual Look. There is no official dress code for this conference, but we recommend clothing that makes you feel comfortable as you will be sitting the entire day of the conference. Layers are always a good suggestion because then you can dress up or dress down as room temperature can vary. At the welcome reception we suggest (but not mandatory) you wear clothing that represents the system you work for. This can help identify attendees with a particular pension system. On the last day of the conference, we generally see attendees dress more casually and comfortably, as this is generally a travel day for most.

For the day at OPERS on Tuesday April 28, please plan to dress in business casual attire.

Columbus Fun Facts

1. Columbus is the 14th largest city in the country with more than 90 distinct neighborhoods and historic districts.



2. Nearly half of all Americans live within 600 miles of Columbus, making it one of the most centrally located major cities in the US.
3. Columbus is home to over 230 parks and one of the largest urban park systems in the country.
4. Home to The Ohio State University – one of the largest universities in the United States. Go Bucks!
5. The very first Wendy’s opened in downtown Columbus in 1969.
6. The Columbus area is the headquarters for many popular businesses including Nationwide, Bath & Body Works, Abercrombie & Fitch, White Castle and Jeni’s Splendid Ice Creams.
7. Home to more modern architecture by internationally renowned designers than any U.S. city its size.

Columbus Recommended Destinations:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Franklin Park Conservatory & Botanical Gardens 2. Columbus Museum of Art 3. Center of Science and Industry (COSI) 4. Topiary Park 5. Columbus Park of Roses 6. Columbus Zoo and Aquarium | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. German Village 8. North Market - Downtown 9. Scioto Mile 10. Ohio Theatre 11. Columbus Clippers at Huntington Park 12. Columbus Crew at Scotts Miracle Gro Field |
|--|--|

Conference Contacts

System Hosts:

Aurora Pennington, apennington@opers.org
 Caroline Stinziano, cstinziano@opers.org
 Jamie Kelley, jkelly@opers.org
 Kay Salomon, ksalomon@opers.org
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APPFA Programs Chair:

Alex McDowell, pmcdowell@ocers.org

APPFA Programs Committee:

Cathleen Davis, cdavis@psprs.com
 Lorraine Gui, lqui@surs.org
 Kendra Kornack, kkornack@trsil.org
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APPFA Officer Contacts

Nicki E. Russell, President, nickir@mosers.org
 Alex McDowell, Vice-President, Program Committee Chair, pmcdowell@ocers.org
 Leslie Dierlam, Treasurer, leslie.dierlam@sbafla.com
 Matt Priestas, Webmaster, Conference Registration Contact, and APP Contact webmaster@appfa.org
 Kurt Petrie, Secretary and CPE Contact, kurt.petrie@etf.wi.gov
 Amanda Jenami, Board Member, Amanda.Jenami@trs.texas.gov
 Cheryl Cervantes-Dietz, Board Member, ccervantesdietz@calstrs.com

Helpful Reminders



APPFA Professional Development Conference, Spring 2026, Columbus, Ohio

1. The conference registration ends on March 30, 2026 and the hotel registration ends on April 6, 2026. Please use the links provided to APPFA members to book your conference registration and hotel registration.
2. The primary representative must begin the conference registration process by registering all the attendees from their system.
3. Once the conference registration process is completed then APPFA will email the individual attendees so each person can let APPFA know what meals they plan to attend, if a guest will be coming, and other relevant information.
4. The conference APP will be available about one week before the conference.
5. Attendees use the conference APP to check into every session. CPE is only granted if you “check-in” and attend a conference session.
6. Each conference session has a survey. We want your feedback on every session!
7. The conference has an overall survey. We want your feedback about the overall conference!
8. The CPE certificate will be issued via email about 30 days after the conference.
9. Log into the APPFA website to make sure your system information, including auditors listed for your system is accurate and up to date. We know turnover occurs so please ensure your information on APPFA’s website is updated.
10. If you haven’t signed up for the community forum then what are you waiting for? The community forum is an excellent way to network and share information electronically with all the APPFA community in between conferences. But you can only participate if you sign up. Information on how to sign up is in the “Procedures for Website Processes” under Quick Links on APPFA’s website.

What is Next? Glad you Asked! Louisville, Kentucky!

The APPFA Program Committee along with members from the Kentucky pension systems are working on your Fall 2026. The Fall 2026 Professional Development Conference dates have been set with the conference occurring November 8-11, 2026. Stay tuned for more information via email or on [APPFA’s website](#).



APPFA Professional Development Conference, Spring 2026, Columbus, Ohio