2026 connect

ANNUAL ONE-DAY CONFERENCE | NOVEMBER 12, 2026 | 8:30 A.M. – 4:30 P.M.



aaf midlands

IABC International Association of Business Communicators South Carolina

South Carolina Chapter PRSA Public Relations Society of America

AGENDA

8:30-9:30 A.M. — **CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST/REGISTRATION/NETWORKING**

9:30-9:45 A.M. — **WELCOME AND CHAPTER GREETINGS**
Auditorium

McClelland Wagner – AAF Midlands President
Heather Singleton – IABC/SC President
Meredith Houck – SCPRSA President

9:45-10:30 A.M. — **CREATING A CAREER YOU COULD NOT HAVE PLANNED**
Auditorium

Chakisse Newton – Cyberwoven
Great careers can sound almost inevitable when we tell our stories in hindsight. Reality is usually much messier, with fewer straight lines. What happens when your work takes you across industries, roles and unexpected opportunities? Drawing from a career that has crossed business, entrepreneurship, public service and executive leadership, we'll explore how a nonlinear path can become an advantage. How communication skills, curiosity and relationships can create opportunities you couldn't have planned. And how the experiences you're building today can prepare you for possibilities you cannot see yet.

10:30-10:45 A.M. — **BREAK**

10:45-11:45 A.M. — **REIMAGINING THE SPEAKER'S BUREAU: ENGAGING WITH SOUTH CAROLINA COMMUNITIES**
Auditorium

Adriane Radeker – South Carolina Department of Transportation
South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) recently revamped and renamed its speaker's bureau SCDOT Speaks. A key public outreach tool, SCDOT Speaks strengthens SCDOT's community engagement by providing in-person connection opportunities to share the department's vision and plan for transportation.

SCDOT Speaks was restructured to create a more efficient, coordinated system for managing SCDOT's 80+ speakers, presentations, messaging, training and engagement portfolio. The goal was to streamline operations to better support community outreach and stakeholder engagement. Public Outreach Manager Adriane Radeker will share how the Office of Public Engagement successfully reimagined SCDOT's speaker's bureau, focusing on traditional outreach strategies while using modern technology and tools.

Wachovia Room I — **LEADERSHIP PRESENCE IS MORE THAN BEING THE LOUDEST VOICE IN THE ROOM**

Reba Campbell – Medway Group
Leadership presence is more than being the loudest voice in the room. Leaders at every level are most effective and most trusted when they communicate clearly and interact with confidence. Leadership presence is the ability to project steadiness, clarity and confidence, especially when circumstances are difficult.

11:45 A.M.-1 P.M. — **NETWORKING LUNCH**
Wachovia Rooms I-III

1-1:45 P.M. — **AN AI RESPONSIBILITY FRAMEWORK FOR COMMUNICATORS**
Auditorium

Bernadette Adams Davis and Dr. Larry Davis – BDC Strategy Group
In this interactive session, we will outline why communications organizations need an AI responsibility framework and the steps needed to develop and socialize the framework successfully. Participants will leave with an outline they can use immediately to address this challenging and evolving issue.

AGENDA

1:45-2 P.M. **BREAK**

2-3 P.M.
Auditorium

BUILDING (OR REBUILDING) YOUR INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS PLAN: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Alan Jenkins, SCMP – Milliken & Company
Samantha Maich – Milliken & Company

Every internal communicator needs a plan, but how do you know if yours is built for success? Join Alan Jenkins, SCMP, and Samantha Maich of Milliken & Company for a practical workshop that explores the essential questions every communications leader should ask when building a new internal communications plan or evaluating an existing one. Using the real-world example of redesigning Milliken's Ethics and Compliance Communications Plan, you will learn how to identify priorities, define audiences, develop meaningful objectives, select the right channels, and measure success.

Whether you are starting from scratch or looking to strengthen your current approach, you'll leave with ideas you can immediately apply to create a more focused, effective communications strategy.

Wachovia Room I

MAXIMIZING IMPACT: BUILDING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS WITH LIMITED RESOURCES

Chelsea Bennett – Ivey Palmer PR
Heather Singleton – Strategic Public Relations Consulting

In an ever-evolving funding and resource environment, organizations are constantly challenged to "do more with less" without sacrificing quality or brand integrity. This interactive session moves past 101-level theories to help leaders, nonprofits, and communicators assess their internal assets, establish repeatable systems, and cultivate brand consistency.

Participants will learn how to shift from reactive trend-chasing to intentional, sustained engagement through core messaging, authentic branding, internal advocacy, and strategic partnerships. Leave with actionable strategies to scale your communications footprint, leverage your existing ecosystem, and effectively measure success.

3-3:15 P.M. **BREAK**

3:15-4 P.M.
Auditorium

BUILDING THE PLANE WHILE FLYING? DON'T WORRY, I'VE GOT THIS! STAYING RESILIENT WHEN COMMUNICATIONS NEVER SLOWS DOWN

Dr. Elaine Chavez Swain, LMSW – Center for Organization Resilience, Columbia College

Communicators are accustomed to keeping things moving, managing competing priorities and navigating change, often while projecting the calm confidence that says, "I've got this." But what does carrying that responsibility day after day do to our own well-being?

The persistent resilience of leadership makes us exceptional and often, admirable people. Our days are early and long, balancing projects and communicating decisions like a decorated pilot in a storm. We are the champions of multi-tasking. The critical question is what happens in our bodies while we are leading successfully? When do we release the burden of responsibility? Come join Dr. Swain in exploring the landscapes of leading — parachute in one hand and flight plan in another.

AGENDA

4 P.M. **CLOSING AND THANK YOU**

4:30-6 P.M. **HAPPY HOUR NETWORKING MEET UP**

Join your colleagues for happy hour at Three Notch'd Brewery and Craft Kitchen following today's conference. Participants will be responsible for purchasing their own drinks.

Three Notch'd Brewery and Craft Kitchen
945 Sabal St.
Columbia, SC 29201

MEET THE SPEAKERS



CHELSEA BENNETT

Founder and CEO – Ivey Palmer PR

Chelsea Bennett is the founder and CEO of Ivey Palmer PR, a strategic communications agency helping organizations turn complex ideas, important work, and challenging moments into clear, compelling communication.

With nearly two decades of experience in communications, public relations, government, and reputation management, Bennett has advised public and private sector organizations on how to communicate with greater clarity, credibility, and impact. Her experience includes serving as a public information officer for high-profile civil and criminal matters at the City of Columbia Attorney's Office, leading communications for Richland County Government, and advising organizations through high-stakes initiatives, community engagement efforts, media opportunities, and reputation-sensitive situations.

Today, Bennett brings that experience to Ivey Palmer PR, where she helps organizations move beyond simply producing more content to building communications strategies and systems that actually support their goals. Her approach combines strategic thinking with practical execution, with an emphasis on helping organizations communicate more intentionally, efficiently, and effectively, especially when resources are limited.

A passionate advocate for strategic communication as a leadership function, Bennett is known for making complicated communication challenges feel manageable and giving organizations a clearer path forward.



REBA CAMPBELL

Founder – Medway Group

After spending more than 35 years in the halls of Congress, the State House and more city halls than she can count, Reba Campbell launched the Medway Group in 2022 to focus on communications strategy, leadership training, and advocacy outreach for public and private sector clients.

Campbell has built a career guiding seasoned and emerging leaders to communicate with clarity, confidence and credibility. Whether she's helping someone sharpen a speech, strengthen a presentation, or simply communicate more effectively with their team, her approach is practical, encouraging and grounded in real-world experience.

Her previous roles include deputy executive director at the Municipal Association of South Carolina, press secretary and lobbyist on Capitol Hill, vice president and interim president at South Carolina Educational Television, and leadership positions in state and local campaigns along with education and fundraising organizations.

In addition to serving her Medway Group clients, Campbell is a media trainer and writing coach at the Buckley School of Public Speaking, teaches college-level communications courses, and speaks on leadership topics.

MEET THE SPEAKERS



BERNADETTE ADAMS DAVIS

Founder – BDC Strategy Group

Bernadette Adams Davis is the founder of BDC Strategy Group and a communications consultant and public relations strategist with more than 25 years of experience in public affairs, communications and media. Prior to launching BDC in 2014, she worked in the Public Affairs division at Walt Disney World Resort.

She is based in Atlanta and leads a national network of senior communications experts who have supported Fortune 100 companies and leading nonprofits. Her team has led editorial, employee, media and executive communications projects across sectors, including clients in entertainment and hospitality, technology, healthcare, community development and food and agriculture.

Davis began her career as a journalist at The Greenville News and the Orlando Business Journal; this experience continues to inform her strategic approach and deep understanding of how to position stories for the moment. She holds degrees in literature from Emory University and the University of Central Florida, which further ground her work in narrative structure, audience insight, and the craft of storytelling.

Her experience also includes working at the Florida A&M University College of Law, Cox Interactive Media and Chernoff/Silver. She is a native of Spartanburg, South Carolina.



DR. LARRY DAVIS

Chief AI Officer – BDC Strategy Group

Dr. Larry Davis serves as Chief AI Officer for BDC Strategy Group, where he leads the development of the firm's AI technology stack and guides its Strategic Communications + AI Advisory practice. His work focuses on responsible AI transformation and change management for corporate and nonprofit clients.

Dr. Davis is a scientist with a Ph.D. in electrical engineering and a funded technology entrepreneur with deep experience in building artificial intelligence and machine learning solutions. He has worked across the full technology pipeline, from scientific research and concept development to design, implementation, testing and cloud deployment, including infrastructure setup and administration.

Dr. Davis holds a bachelor's degree from Florida A&M University and both a master's degree and Ph.D. from the University of Central Florida, all in electrical engineering. His areas of expertise include artificial intelligence, software engineering, cloud configuration and administration, and virtual and augmented reality. He holds an augmented reality patent licensed for external use.

Outside of work, he enjoys playing chess online and training for Spartan races.

MEET THE SPEAKERS



ALAN JENKINS

Senior Manager of Brand and Communications – Milliken & Company

Alan Jenkins, SCMP, is a senior manager of brand and communications for Milliken & Company, leading enterprise communications and associate engagement efforts. He collaborates across global teams to align messaging and advise leaders on communication strategy.



SAMANTHA MAICH

Senior Analyst – Milliken & Company

Samantha Maich is a senior analyst for Milliken & Company, specializing in sustainability, ethics and compliance, and human rights. She partners across global teams to strengthen responsible business practices and enhance external reporting strategies.



CHAKISSE NEWTON

CEO – Cyberwoven

Chakisse Newton is CEO of Cyberwoven, where she leads the firm's growth, market positioning and strategic direction. Her more than 25-year career spans marketing and communications, strategy, consulting, entrepreneurship and organizational leadership.

Over the course of her career, Newton has built and led her own consulting practice, served as associate vice president of marketing at Midlands Technical College, where she led the college's rebranding effort, and worked with organizations ranging from local nonprofits and higher education institutions to national and global companies. Alongside her professional work, she has an extensive history of board and community service. In 2019, she was elected to Richland County Council, where she currently represents District 11.

A Columbia native, Newton is a Liberty Fellow and member of the Aspen Global Leadership Network, as well as a Riley Diversity Leadership Fellow.

MEET THE SPEAKERS



ADRIANE RADEKER

Public Outreach Manager – South Carolina Department of Transportation

Adriane Radeker is the Public Outreach Manager at the South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT). Radeker is responsible for managing SCDOT's speaker's bureau, SCDOT Speaks, and for serving as the primary spokesperson to community members and public interest groups across South Carolina.

Before joining the Office of Public Engagement in 2024, Radeker was a program manager in the Office of the Secretary of Transportation. She has also served as an executive assistant and FOIA Officer at SCDOT. Prior to joining SCDOT, Radeker was the Circuit Court Liaison at the South Carolina Judicial Department for 13 years.

Radeker holds a Master of Public Administration from the University of South Carolina and a Bachelor of Arts degree from Winthrop University. She was born and raised in Orangeburg and graduated from Edisto High School in rural Orangeburg County. The daughter of public servants, Radeker is passionate about getting to know and helping people. She lives in Columbia with her husband, their two teenagers, two golden retrievers and her husband's mountain feist.



HEATHER SINGLETON

Principal Consultant – Strategic Public Relations Consulting

Heather Singleton has worked with public and private nonprofit organizations for nearly two decades. Born and raised in Charleston, South Carolina, she graduated with a political science degree from the University of South Carolina in 2010 and has since called the Midlands home.

Passionate about policy communications and strategy, Singleton has worked in public service and corporate sectors, focusing on brand strategy, facilitation and fund development. She is currently the principal consultant of Strategic Public Relations Consulting, a consultancy that supports nonprofit and political organizations with internal and external communications strategy.

Singleton finds purpose in helping others improve their professional skills to become the success stories that they were born to be. A member of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., she believes in the power of serving her local community. She is a board member of the South Carolina chapter of the International Association of Business Communicators, City Year Columbia, and WellPartners Dental and Eye Clinic, and volunteers with her church and the Camden alumni chapter of her sorority. Singleton enjoys spending time with family and friends, traveling, and listening to music in her spare time.

MEET THE SPEAKERS



DR. ELAINE CHAVEZ SWAIN, LMSW

Associate Professor and Director – Center for Organization Resilience, Columbia College

Elaine Chavez Swain is a Filipina-American, born and raised in New York City.

She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in psychology in 1995 and a Masters degree in social work in 1999 from the University of South Carolina. After 26 years of professional experience in the social work field, Swain achieved a Doctorate in social work from Capella University in 2023. One of her most challenging and favorite jobs was serving as a school district administrator for more than a decade.

Slowing down, she currently serves as an associate professor, Bachelor of Social Work program chair and the director of the Center for Organization Resilience at Columbia College, where she facilitates learning and empowers individuals, groups and organizations to create resilient and sustainable changes in their organizations.

Removing barriers to people's success and negotiating systems drives her love of the profession.

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Special thanks to the CONNECT Conference co-chairs Chelsea Bennett and Alison Shuman and our hard-working and much appreciated committee members Mary-Kathryn Craft, Nikasha Dicks, Lauren McAlexander, Nancy Rice, Libby Roerig, Heather Singleton and McClelland Wagner.

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