



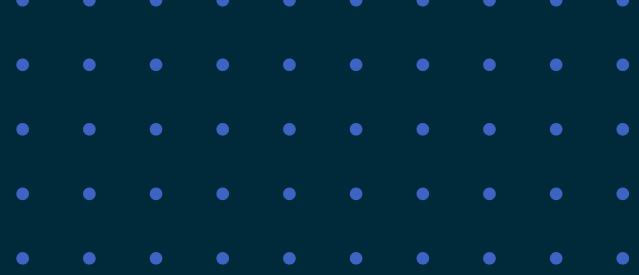
PAAC
PUBLIC AFFAIRS
ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

PAAC Annual Conference 2025

Meeting the Moment

Vancouver
SFU Harbour Centre
November 12 and 13

Wednesday November 12



8:00 am

Registration and Breakfast

8:30 am to 9:00 am

Welcome Address

9:00 am to 9:45 am

Keynote & Fireside Chat

9:45 am to 10:45 am

Panel 1: Challenges of Working with
Government During Uncertain Times

10:45 am to 11:45 am

Panel 2: Navigating Productivity and
Trade Headwinds

12:00 pm to 1:30 pm

Award of Distinction Luncheon

1:45 pm to 2:45 pm

Panel 3: Promise of Indigenous
leadership in natural resources

2:45 pm to 3:45 pm

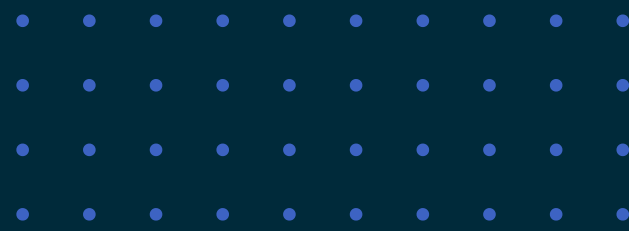
Panel 4: Industry and the Canada-US
Relationship

2:45 pm to 3:45 pm

Panel 5: Federal Budget Debrief

5:00 pm to 7:00 pm Evening Reception (Hydra Wine Bar)

Thursday November 13



9:00AM

Breakfast and Welcome Day 2

9:30 am to 10:30 pm

Panel 6: Leveraging digital channels to amplify your public affairs messaging

10:30 am to 11:00 am

Coffee and Networking Break

11:00 am to 12:00 pm

Panel 7: Public Affairs in Flux: Lessons from the Frontlines of Change

12:00 pm to 12:30 pm

Closing & Lunch

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Keynote & Fireside Chat

Public Opinion in a World on Edge: Making Sense of the Chaos



Shachi Kurl

President of The Angus Reid Institute

Shachi Kurl is President of the Angus Reid Institute, Canada's non-profit foundation committed to independent research. She works with public opinion data to further public knowledge and enhance the national understanding of issues that matter to Canada and the world.

Kurl is often found offering analysis on CBC's "Power and Politics", in the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times, the Globe and Mail, and on the editorial pages of the Ottawa Citizen, among other places. In October 2020, she moderated BC's only televised provincial election debate, presented by the British Columbia Broadcast Consortium.

She spent the first part of her career as political reporter and holds a degree in Journalism and Political Science from Carleton University. She returned to Carleton University as an Adjunct Research Professor in the School of Journalism and Communication in 2022.

Kurl is a recipient of the prestigious Jack Webster Award for Best TV Reporting. Along with former Australian and UK Prime Ministers Julia Gillard and Margaret Thatcher, she is an Alumnus of the US State Department's International Visitor Leadership Program. She is a national co-chair of the Canadian Cancer Society.

Kurl moderated the 2021 English language leaders debate during the 44th federal election. She also won the Industry Marvel Award from Darpan Magazine in October of that year.

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Challenges of Working with Government During Uncertain Times



Matt Smith

[Former Chief of Staff to Premier Eby and Executive Vice President West, Pollara Insights](#)

Matt Smith is Executive Vice President, West, at Pollara Strategic Insights, with over 20 years of experience in research, communications, and political strategy. He previously served as Chief of Staff to BC Premier David Eby and was President of Stratcom, leading major campaigns like Toronto's VaxTO and advising municipal leaders across Canada. A recognized innovator in data-driven engagement, Matt holds an M.A. in Electoral Geography from the University of Toronto and has been featured in Maclean's New Power List and Vancouver Magazine's Power 50.



Mary Polak

[Former BC Liberal Minister; CEO BC Cares Providers Association](#)

Mary Polak is a public policy leader with more than 25 years of experience in elected office and public affairs. Her B.C. government portfolios have included responsibility for Public Health, Oversight of Seniors Long Term Care Regulation, Children in Care, Environment and Indigenous Relations. Her passion for seniors' living, wellness, and care is a reflection of her love for her elderly father who is living with dementia. Mary is a lifelong British Columbian who lives in Langley. She is a recipient of the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond and Platinum Jubilee Medals and the King Charles III Coronation Medal.



Peter Julian

[Former NDP MP](#)

Peter Julian was the second longest serving House Leader for the federal NDP since its founding. He was elected seven times to represent the communities of New Westminster and Burnaby in the House of Commons. He is the only New Democrat to have served in the combined roles as Official Opposition House Leader, Shadow Finance Minister and National Caucus Chair. Prior to serving in Canada's Parliament, Peter was CEO of an innovative award-winning social enterprise that provided supports to people with disabilities.



Shannon Phillips

[former Alberta NDP Minister; Principal at Meredith, Bossenkool & Phillips](#)

Shannon Phillips is a former Alberta Cabinet Minister and seasoned policy leader with over 20 years of experience in governance, energy, and environmental policy. As Minister of Environment and Parks and Minister Responsible for the Climate Change Office under Premier Rachel Notley, she led Alberta's Climate Leadership Plan, advancing renewable energy, phasing out coal, and creating thousands of jobs. Now a partner at Meredith Boessenkool & Phillips, she continues to shape policy through strategic advice and mentorship. A Blackfoot Headdress holder and YWCA Woman of Distinction, Shannon also teaches political science at the University of Lethbridge.

Navigating Productivity and Trade Headwinds



Emma Macklem

Partner, Framepoint

Emma Macklem is a Founding Partner of Framepoint Public Affairs, a BC-based public affairs consulting firm launched in 2023. Emma specializes in government relations, advocacy and digital campaigns, and stakeholder engagement. Prior to co-founding Framepoint, Emma worked for a national public affairs firm in Vancouver. Emma has supported clients in securing significant policy and legislative changes, government funding, and approvals for major infrastructure and development projects.



Laura Jones

President and CEO, Business Council of British Columbia

Laura Jones is President and CEO of the Business Council of British Columbia (BCBC), a non-partisan organization representing the province's leading businesses for over 50 years. Before joining BCBC, she served as Chief Strategic Officer and Executive Vice President at the Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB), overseeing advocacy, research, and member relations. A champion of collaboration and leadership development, she created CFIB's internship and VP mentorship programs. Laura holds a B.A. in Economics from Mount Holyoke College and an M.A. from Simon Fraser University.



Sussanne Skidmore

President, BC Federation of Labour

Sussanne Skidmore was elected BCFED president in 2022 after being elected as the federation's secretary-treasurer in 2018 and 2020. A well-known human rights, social justice and queer rights activist, she served as executive vice-president of BCGEU for 5 years. She has co-chaired the BCFED's Human Rights Committee and is active in the federation's Women and Gender Rights Committee. Skidmore is the national treasurer for the New Democratic Party of Canada and a vice president of the BC NDP.



Alexa Young

Vice President Government Relations and External Affairs, VFPA

Alexa Young is Vice President, Government Relations and External Affairs at the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority, providing strategic leadership on government, Indigenous, and stakeholder relations, as well as communications. With nearly 20 years of experience, she has built public affairs and sustainability functions across Canada's leading resource and tech companies, including TELUS, Teck, and the BC Council of Forest Industries. Alexa holds an MSc in Politics and Communications from the London School of Economics and a BA (Hons.) in Political Science from Queen's University. She was named to Business in Vancouver's Top 40 Under 40 and is an alumna of the Governor General's Canadian Leadership Conference.

Promise of Indigenous Leadership in Natural Resources



Allie Meeres

[Executive VP & Partner at Sedgwick Strategies](#)

Allie Meeres is Executive Vice President and Partner at Sedgwick Strategies, advising leading energy clients on Indigenous engagement, government relations, and communications. She played a key role in securing a \$400 million federal loan guarantee for the Stonalec8 First Nations Alliance, enabling a 12.5% equity stake in Enbridge's Westcoast pipeline. She also led stakeholder relations for Woodfibre LNG, advancing Canada's first Indigenous-led environmental assessment. A collaborative leader grounded in empathy, Allie has supported Indigenous leaders at COP27, serves on the Vancouver Opera board, and co-hosts the Primary Risk podcast on building major projects.



Todd Stone

[President & CEO, Association for Mineral Exploration](#)

Todd Stone is President and CEO of the Association for Mineral Exploration BC (AME), advocating for the vital role of mineral exploration in British Columbia's economy. A former MLA for Kamloops-South Thompson, he served nearly 12 years in the legislature, including as Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure. Before politics, Todd founded and led iCompass Technologies, providing digital solutions to local governments across North America. His combined public- and private-sector experience reflects a deep commitment to responsible growth and effective policy.



Dallas Smith

[President, Nanwakolas Council](#)

Dallas is the founder, president, and CEO of the Nanwakolas Council, a leading First Nations organization that protects cultural values while building partnerships with government and industry to advance sustainable opportunities in the Great Bear Rainforest and beyond. A proud member of the Tlowitsis Nation, Dallas has spent over 30 years navigating complex negotiations, driving collaborative governance, and championing Indigenous-led conservation. He has served on numerous boards, including Island Coastal Economic Trust, Coast Funds, and GeoScience BC.



Andrew Robinson

[Chief Executive Officer / Executive, Nisga'a Lisims Government](#)

Andrew Robinson is a proud member of the Nisga'a Nation, People of the Nass River, and resides in his home community of Laxgalts'ap. He is Gisk'aast (Killerwhale tribe) and from the royal house of Ni'isy'uus. Andrew served over 20 years as Chief Administrative Officer for the Laxgalts'ap Village Government before joining Nisga'a Lisims Government (NLG) as Executive Industry Relations Manager in 2022. In 2023, he was appointed to the Office of the CEO, overseeing 11 departments and 180 employees. Deeply rooted in Nisga'a governance, Andrew carries forward his forebearers' commitment to land, culture, and the enduring authority of the Nisga'a Nation.

Industry and the Canada-US Relationship



Sabrina Grover

Senior Advisor, NorthStar Public Affairs

Sabrina Grover is a Senior Advisor with NorthStar Public Affairs, with extensive experience in political strategy, advocacy, and communications across Canada and internationally. She has led major global health and development advocacy efforts, helping secure over \$3 billion in Canadian investments, including Canada's \$1.5B commitment to Global Vaccine Equity. Sabrina has served as an international election observer in Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka and co-chaired the 2018 G7 Youth Summit. Politically active in both Ontario and Alberta, she managed Mark Sutcliffe's winning mayoral campaign in Ottawa and ran as the Federal Liberal candidate in Calgary-Centre in 2021. She also serves on the boards of the Sled Island Music Festival and HomeSpace Society in Calgary.



Diamond Isinger

Former Advisor to Prime Minister Trudeau

Diamond Isinger is a public policy specialist providing advocacy counsel and consulting services. She has worked with industry associations, on political campaigns at all levels of government, and within the Government of Canada, including as an advisor in the Prime Minister's Office on Canada-U.S. relations during the first and second Trump administrations (including the renegotiation of NAFTA through 2017-2018), and at Global Affairs Canada in the Office of the Minister of International Trade. Diamond has served as a senior non-profit volunteer and governance leader for organizations like Girl Guides of Canada, Volunteer BC, and other charitable causes. She regularly participates as a media/public commentator and subject matter expert about politics, leadership, civic engagement, and public policy issues in British Columbia and Canada.



Zara Rabinovitch

Vice President, Sustainability and Public Affairs, COFI

Zara Rabinovitch is Vice President of Sustainability and Public Affairs at the BC Council of Forest Industries (COFI), where she leads strategies to advance the forest sector's role as a provider of low-carbon, renewable products. She oversees government relations, public affairs, and environmental policy engagement affecting forest product manufacturing. Previously, Zara served as Senior Policy Advisor to Canada's Minister of Natural Resources and Minister of International Trade, helping launch initiatives such as the Forest Bioeconomy Framework, Softwood Lumber Action Plan, and Generation Energy Dialogue. She has also worked in film production and communications at global think tanks. Zara holds a B.A. in Political Science from UBC and an M.Sc. in Comparative Politics from the LSE.

Federal Budget Debrief



Nicole Braassard

Vice-President, British Columbia, Global Public Affairs

Nicole Brassard leads Global Public Affairs' British Columbia practice, overseeing offices in Vancouver, Victoria, and Nanaimo. She brings extensive experience in government relations, stakeholder engagement, and strategic communications, advising clients across infrastructure, transportation, technology, and post-secondary sectors. Drawing on her deep experience in government relations and as a member of Mark Carney's leadership and federal election campaign, she will share key intelligence to help BC businesses anticipate and respond to shifts in the political landscape.



Raj Sihota

Vice-President, British Columbia, Strategies 360

Raj Sihota is a veteran strategist with deep experience at the intersection of politics, policy, and communications. As Vice-President of Strategies 360 BC, she helps organizations navigate complex public affairs challenges, drawing on her background as Executive Director of the BC NDP and senior advisor across multiple campaigns. Raj is widely recognized for her insight into political dynamics and her ability to bridge relationships between government, industry, and community stakeholders.



Allie Blades

Senior Advisor at Framepoint

Allie Blades is a Senior Advisor at Framepoint, where she develops communications and public affairs strategies that help organizations tell compelling stories and influence public conversations. She brings experience across political, non-profit, and private sectors, with a focus on message development, strategic positioning, and stakeholder engagement. Known for her creative approach, Allie helps clients translate complex policy issues into clear, impactful narratives.



Zita Astravas

Vice-President, Federal, Wellington Advocacy

Zita Astravas is Vice-President, Federal at Wellington Advocacy, leading national public affairs strategies in Ottawa. She previously served as Chief of Staff to the Minister of National Defence and in senior communications and policy roles in the Prime Minister's Office. Zita is known for her deep understanding of federal decision-making, her crisis-management expertise, and her ability to align government, business, and stakeholder interests on major policy initiatives.

Leveraging Digital Channels to Amplify your Public Affairs Messaging



Colin Aitchison

Director, Western Canada, Enterprise

Colin Aitchison is Director, Western Canada, at Enterprise Canada, a national strategic communications and public affairs firm. He has advised ministers in the governments of Doug Ford, Jason Kenney, and Danielle Smith, leading communications for major policy initiatives, including Alberta's education response during COVID-19 and wildfire communications during the 2023 provincial election. Colin previously served as Acting Director of Government Communications to Alberta's 19th Premier and began his career in post-secondary advocacy in Ontario. He also managed communications for the European Space Policy Institute in Vienna. Based in Calgary, Colin holds a History degree from Wilfrid Laurier University.



Heather Stoutenburg

Digital Strategist and former Provincial Director, BC NDP

Heather Stoutenburg is a campaigner and advisor who's been working in digital since MSN Messenger was cutting-edge. After starting her career in the private sector with clients from non-profits to Fortune 500s, she joined the NDP nine years ago — and never left. Heather has since led digital and communications strategy for campaigns across Canada, including serving as Federal NDP Digital Director and Communications Lead for the Yukon NDP. From 2020 to 2024, she was Executive Director of the BC NDP, building and leading the team that delivered back-to-back provincial election victories.



Chazz Clevinger

Founder and CEO, CiviClick

Chazz Clevinger is the Founder and CEO of CiviClick, an innovative digital advocacy and public affairs technology company based in Washington, D.C., serving clients across the U.S., Canada, and Australia. A recognized leader in digital advocacy, Chazz has earned seven Reed Awards from Campaigns & Elections for excellence in technology, innovation, and grassroots campaigning, including work for DraftKings and Coach USA/Megabus. He is also a recipient of the "40 Under 40" Award from the American Association of Political Consultants (AAPC), recognizing his impact on the intersection of technology, advocacy, and public affairs.



Brett Thalmann

Founding Partner, Nexus Strategic Consultants

Brett Thalmann is a founding partner of Nexus Strategic Consultants with over 20 years of experience as a political advisor, strategist, and community organizer. He spent seven years in the Prime Minister's Office as Executive Director of Planning, Administration and People, overseeing Research and Advertising, Strategic Planning, Appointments, and HR. Brett led national campaign efforts in the 2015, 2019, and 2021 federal elections, driving targeted communications through digital, earned media, and voter outreach. Before 2015, he built the Liberal Party's digital and grassroots infrastructure in Ontario, recruiting candidates and volunteers across the province.

Public Affairs in Flux: Lessons from the Frontlines of Change



Dan Hurley

Head of Public Affairs, Communications, ESG, Navitas

Dan Hurley is Head of Public Affairs, Communications, and Strategy for Navitas University Partnerships North America, with over 30 years of experience in politics, public affairs, communications, and postsecondary education. His career began in politics, serving as a senior advisor and chief of staff to the federal minister of the environment, and later as a 2008 federal candidate. A former CBC Radio journalist and naval reserve officer, Dan has since led major education initiatives, including one of Canada's first tuition waiver programs for youth in care. An Accredited Public Relations professional, he serves on the PAAC national board and lives near Nanaimo, B.C.



Trevor Boudreau

Senior Director Government Relations, SFU

Trevor Presiloski brings nearly 20 years of experience in strategic communications, stakeholder engagement, and government relations. Before joining Simon Fraser University, he spent six years with the Vancouver Airport Authority (YVR), including as Director of Government Relations, where he led a multi-year partnership with the Province of B.C. to advance decarbonization, intermodal transportation, and economic growth. A skilled collaborator, Trevor previously ran his own public affairs consultancy, advising clients across healthcare, energy, and infrastructure. Trevor grew up in Peterborough, Ontario, which is in the traditional territory of the Michi Saagig peoples (part of the land covered by Treaty 20).



Richard Truscott

Vice President, Prairie Sky Strategy

Richard Truscott is Vice-President at Prairie Sky Strategy, a Calgary-based public affairs firm with reach across Western Canada and Ottawa. With over 30 years of experience in government relations, policy, and advocacy, he previously spent a decade in senior leadership at the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, driving key regulatory and policy reforms. Richard's career began on Parliament Hill and includes roles with Venture Communications, Maple Leaf Strategies, and the Certified General Accountants Association of Alberta. He holds a BA from the University of Calgary, an MBA from Queen's University, and is Accredited in Public Relations (CPRS), where he formerly served as national president.



Alexis Easton

Chief Public Affairs Officer - Royal Ontario Museum

Alexis Easton is Chief Public Affairs Officer and Board Secretary at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) in Toronto, where she leads government relations and stakeholder engagement. She also serves as President of the Public Affairs Association of Canada and sits on its national board. With extensive experience across public affairs and government, Alexis offers deep insight into the relationship between stakeholders and policymakers. During her time in government, she managed complex policy and engagement files, building a reputation for strategic collaboration and sound judgment. Alexis is recognized for her expertise in navigating political, policy, and government processes with precision and integrity.