



NATIONAL DEFENDER INVESTIGATOR ASSOCIATION
2026 REGIONAL CONFERENCE
Scottsdale, AZ



“Defend with Purpose: Magnificence in Maricopa”

4:00 pm – 6:00 pm		REGISTRATION		TUESDAY, September 8	
8:00 am – 9:00 am		REGISTRATION and COFFEE BAR (Orangedale CD / Patio)		WEDNESDAY, September 9	
9:00 am – 9:15 am		WELCOME & OPENING REMARKS			
9:15 am – 10:30 am		PLENARY			
AI on Trial Brian Chase, Managing Director, Digital Forensics & eDiscovery, ArcherHall, Tucson, AZ Orangedale ABEF This session will focus on the challenges of dealing with AI generated/falsified evidence (photos, videos, audio, etc.) and also talk about the use of AI by law enforcement.					
10:30 am – 10:45 am		Networking Break, Exhibits			
10:45 am – 12:00 pm					
Investigate Smarter: AI, OSINT, and the Modern Defense Case Maria Sapene, Chief of Litigation Support, Federal Public Defender Central District of California, Los Angeles, CA Orangedale AF Online evidence can corroborate a defense theory, expose weaknesses in the government's narrative, locate critical witnesses, preserve impeachment material, and uncover facts that conventional investigation may miss. But the OSINT landscape is changing quickly—and AI is expanding both the opportunities and the risks. Designed for experienced criminal defense investigators, this session moves beyond basic Google and social-media searches. Participants will learn advanced search-engine techniques, targeted social-media research methods, emerging AI-assisted investigative tools, and efficient workflows for finding, evaluating, documenting, and preserving online information for use in real cases. Attendees will leave with practical reference guides, case-ready handouts, and a curated collection of OSINT bookmarks and resources they can put to work immediately.		Interviewing with Emotional Intelligence Lubna Debbini, Investigator, Orange County Associate Defender, Santa Ana, CA Citrus Room Investigations often succeed or fail based on the quality of human interaction. This interactive course equips defense investigators and paralegals with the tools and communication techniques required to navigate high-stakes interviews. Participants will learn to leverage emotional intelligence (EI) to read subtle cues, manage intense interpersonal dynamics, and defuse volatile situations. Through practical frameworks and tactical communication strategies, you will master the art of uncovering pertinent details for the case. Recognize non-verbal behavior, and manage your own emotional triggers during encounters. Craft sophisticated, open-ended lines of questioning that minimize defensiveness. Master the skill of validation without confirmation, and pivot strategies when facing deflective, aggressive, or evasive responses. Build rapid, authentic trust with diverse subjects without compromising investigative boundaries or legal integrity.		Video Evidence and Law Enforcement: Best Practices vs Real World Joshua Cohen, Principal, Fat Pencil Studio, Portland, OR Orangedale BE This session builds on the material covered in the plenary session to offer insight on specific problems with video evidence collection and strategies for pushing back against unsupported charges. In a world awash with AI generated images and video, defense team members are forced to ask, "How can I be sure this evidence is authentic?" It is possible to answer this question if law enforcement follows best practices for collecting digital media. Unfortunately, this rarely happens. In the real world, law enforcement often relies on unqualified parties to collect and submit video clips of their choosing without verifying that all relevant footage was collected at the native camera resolution, and submitted in its original form without alteration. We'll also cover 3d reconstruction including methods for mapping what can be seen in video footage and visualizing the scene from a different perspective.	
New Session Format: Paralegal Focused Breakout – but all are welcome to attend!					
Trial Notebooks That Make a Difference Elizabeth Coss, Paralegal, Maricopa County Office of the Public Defender, Phoenix, AZ Brittany Martin, Paralegal, Capital Unit, Maricopa County Office of the Public Defender, Phoenix, AZ Sunset Room This session is designed for legal professionals who want to streamline their trial preparation using organized and efficient trial binders. The essential components of a trial binder, including document organization, effective indexing methods, and the inclusion of key exhibits and evidence will be discussed, as well as helpful tools and software for assembling digital trial notebooks.					
12:00 pm – 1:15 pm		LUNCH BREAK			
1:15 pm – 2:30 pm					
The Investigator’s Digital Toolkit: Essential OSINT Tools for 2026 Maria Sapene, Chief of Litigation Support, Federal Public Defender Central District of California, Los Angeles, CA Orangedale AF This session is a practical, defense-focused tour of the free and low-cost OSINT tools experienced investigators can use to move faster, dig deeper, and preserve online evidence with confidence. Participants will explore tools and workflows for locating people and digital identities, searching social-media platforms more effectively, analyzing public online activity, extracting useful information from websites and media, and capturing volatile digital evidence in a reliable, case-ready format. The session will focus on real investigative applications—not a generic tools list—including how to assess what a tool can and cannot establish, document your work, and avoid common pitfalls in online research. Attendees will leave with a field-tested resource guide and access to a curated OSINT bookmark collection organized for immediate use in criminal defense investigations.		Best Practices: Video Surveillance Acquisition Matt Hanna, Training Director, NDIA, Washington, DC Citrus Room This session will cover the 101s of acquiring video surveillance footage in the community for your cases, from business entities to private homes. The discussion will include preparation, what to look for on-site, navigating proprietary players and how to work with your office's IT Department to get what is needed downloaded, converted, etc. to use for any presentation in court.		Difficult Situations / De-Escalation Jules Gagnepain, Investigator, Federal Public Defender, District of Arizona, Phoenix, AZ Orangedale BE Using lived experiences as a Sheriff's Deputy/Hostage Negotiator, this session will cover the behavioral change stairway and how to effectively build rapport, with everyone from a client, to a witness or probation officer, or even someone in an active crisis. In our jobs, we often have to communicate difficult information, which is not always well received. This session will highlight the power of empathy and rapport building, as well as the dos and don'ts of successful de-escalation.	
New Session Format: Paralegal Focused Breakout – but all are welcome to attend!					
Acrobat Pro 101: The Essential PDF Toolkit Elizabeth Coss, Paralegal, Maricopa County Office of the Public Defender, Phoenix, AZ Sunset Room This session covers Adobe Acrobat Pro's tools with a live demonstration. The presentation includes how to create PDF portfolios, redact, Bates stamp, edit, secure files, make images readable, as well as covering other tools. This session is beginner friendly, so all skill levels are welcomed.					
2:30 pm – 2:45 pm		Networking Break, Exhibits			
2:45 pm – 4:00 pm					
Investigation Essentials: The Nuts and Bolts of a Mitigation Excavation Matt Silverman, Mitigation Specialist/Investigator, Silverman Mitigation, Phoenix, AZ Orangedale AF This session breaks down the practical mechanics of a mitigation investigation that meets the standard of care. Topics will include best practices focused on interview protocols, fieldwork tips for locating people, the do's and don'ts of mitigation investigation, witness and client interview strategies, and secondary document practices (witness lists, chronologies, etc.). Participants will leave with concrete guidance for making initial contact, maintaining witness relationships over the life of a case, and memorializing work product in ways that best serve the client.		Investigating Police Witnesses and Tracking Official Misconduct Summer Farrar, M.S., Director of Partnerships & Outreach, Techtivist, Inc., Kansas City, MO Citrus Room If you're not investigating the police witnesses in your cases, then you could be missing out on critical evidence that is important at every stage of a case, from pre-trial to post-conviction, as well as impact litigation. This session will teach you how to investigate a police officer's history and start tracking police misconduct using tools you already have. This training will also share practical examples of how these tools improve defense practices across the country and how to build participation within your agency. After this session, you'll feel equipped to investigate the police witnesses in your cases and contribute to holding powerful officials accountable.		Best Practices: The Importance of Safety in Investigations Seana Holland, Director of Investigations, Levy Firestone Muse LLP, Washington, DC Orangedale BE In criminal defense investigations, investigator safety is paramount, yet discussions and training are often limited to physical safety alone. This interactive session broadens that conversation to encompass physical, legal, and emotional safety, offering practical strategies for navigating difficult situations in both the field and office, including the emerging challenges posed by AI's growing role in the legal profession. Drawing on more than twenty years of investigative experience in the United States and abroad, the presenter will share proven tips and strategies for conducting safe, effective investigations.	



NATIONAL DEFENDER INVESTIGATOR ASSOCIATION
2026 REGIONAL CONFERENCE
Scottsdale, AZ



“Defend with Purpose: Magnificence in Maricopa”

New Session Format: Paralegal Focused Breakout – but all are welcome to attend!

Out of State Subpoenas, Court Orders, and ROIs: The What, Why, When, and How for Legal Professionals
Brittany Martin, Paralegal, Capital Unit, Maricopa County Office of the Public Defender, Phoenix, AZ
Sunset Room

Navigating out-of-state subpoenas, court orders, and authorizations for the release of information (ROIs) can be complex and time-consuming. This session provides legal professionals with the knowledge and resources needed to successfully secure witness participation and obtain records from jurisdictions outside their own. Participants will receive sample templates and forms for the documents discussed, providing resources they can immediately apply in their own practice. As the designated point person for out-of-state subpoena requests at the Maricopa County Office of the Public Defender, the presenter regularly assists indigent defense agencies nationwide with obtaining witnesses and records located in Maricopa County. Drawing on real-world experience, she will share practical insights and lessons learned from coordinating interstate legal requests.

4:00 pm – 4:15 pmNetworking Break, Exhibits

4:15 pm – 5:30 pmPLENARY

Extradited Innocence: The Case of Javier Lorenzano-Nunez
Bill Daniels, Investigator, Maricopa County Office of the Legal Advocate, Phoenix, AZ
Jessica Valdivia-Luna, Homicide Attorney, Maricopa County Office of the Legal Advocate, Phoenix, AZ
Orangedale ABEF

Javier is a Mexican national who was kidnapped off the streets of Tijuana, extradited to Maricopa County, and charged with a cold case homicide from 1998. Through extensive investigation, work, and motions, the Maricopa County Attorney’s Office ultimately dismissed the case. Javier is innocent. This session will discuss the egregious misconduct by both the Phoenix Police Department and the Maricopa County Attorney’s Office, what to watch out for in cold case investigations, and what investigation you need to do yourself for an innocent client.

Networking Reception – Orangedale CD & Patio
5:30 pm – 7:00 pm

8:00 am – 9:00 amCOFFEE BAR (Orangedale CD / Patio)THURSDAY, September 10

9:10 am – 9:15 amDAY 2 OPENING REMARKS

9:15 am – 10:30 amPLENARY

Representing Clients on the Autism Spectrum: Reframing Risk, Responsibility, and Representation
Doug Passon, President & Creative Director, Doug Passon Law, Scottsdale, AZ
Laurie Sperry, Ph.D., BCBA-D, MSc Forensic Psychology/Criminal Investigation, Autism Forensics, LLC, Golden, CO
Orangedale ABEF

The CDC estimates that 1/31 people have Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), a lifelong developmental disability that affects a person’s brain functioning and ability to successfully navigate the social world. ASD cuts across socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, and intellectual levels. It is often called the “hidden disability,” and people on the highest end of the spectrum may be most at risk within the criminal justice system. Unfortunately, those in the justice system often don’t know what ASD is, or why it matters in every case. Therefore, we must better understand the facts about ASD and work together to find just and creative solutions that serve the dual purpose of keeping society safe and rehabilitating the person on the spectrum. This program provides an overview of ASD, examines why it is almost certainly relevant to culpability, mitigation, and treatability, and considers the unique vulnerabilities of people with ASD once they enter a prison setting.

10:30 am – 10:45 amNetworking Break, Exhibits

10:45 am – 12:00 pmCONCURRENT SESSIONS

Beyond the Docket: Practical Strategies for Supporting Neurodiverse Clients Laurie Sperry, Ph.D., BCBA-D, MSc Forensic Psychology/Criminal Investigation, Autism Forensics, LLC, Golden, CO Orangedale AF Neurodivergent individuals—including those with autism, ADHD, and learning differences—are significantly overrepresented at every stage of the justice system. For legal and correctional professionals, recognizing and effectively responding to neurodivergent traits is critical for ensuring due diligence, accurate mitigation, and successful community re-entry. This highly interactive session moves beyond basic definitions to equip defense team members with actionable accommodations and tools. Participants will analyze real-world case studies, engage in peer-to-peer problem-solving, and leave with a practical toolkit designed to improve client rapport, de-escalate crisis situations, and build legally robust mitigation themes. By the end of this session, participants will be able to: identify common behavioral presentations, adapt interviewing techniques, implement immediate, concrete strategies to help neurodivergent clients successfully navigate court orders, parole conditions, and legal timelines, and formulate persuasive, data-driven mitigation narratives.	Defending Noncitizens: Unique Challenges in an Ever-Changing System Evelyn Cruz, PhD, JD, Clinical Professor of Law, Director, Immigration Clinic, Sandra Day O’Connor College of Law, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ Citrus Room In an immigration system that can feel impossible to navigate, the presenter will draw on their experience to help attendees identify immigration-related issues that intersect with the defense of any potential criminal case. To this end, the speaker will deconstruct and contextualize the various levels of exposure a client may face under current immigration enforcement policies. Specific topics include existing immigration status categories, verification tools, and methods for locating and tracking individuals in ICE custody.	Location Data – What’s Reliable and What Isn’t Brian Chase, Managing Director, Digital Forensics & eDiscovery, ArcherHall, Tucson, AZ Orangedale BE This session covers sources of location data such as cell site, cellphone, and GPS data, and will explore common claims from law enforcement about reliability, with an eye towards debunking them.
--	--	---

New Session Format: Mitigation/Visual Advocacy Focused Breakout – but all are welcome to attend!

Story Development (Pre-Production)
Doug Passon, President & Creative Director, Doug Passon Law, Scottsdale, AZ
Sunset Room

This is a crash course on the types of sentencing mitigation stories we tell and the proper narrative structure for effective telling. Here we will discuss the "3Rs" of sentencing mitigation storytelling (Revelation, Relativity & Redemption), as well as the "And, But, & Therefore" (ABT) narrative template, which capture the three fundamental forces of narrative: Agreement, Contradictions, & Consequence. This simple, highly actionable formula allows the team to boil complex facts and law into a clear, concise and compelling story. Note: *This information is important to all cases, regardless of whether a sentencing mitigation film is in the works.* Everyone needs to understand legal storytelling and the power it has to win at any stage of the proceedings.

12:00 pm – 1:15 pmLUNCH BREAK

1:15 pm – 2:30 pmCONCURRENT SESSIONS

Testifying Lubna Debbini, Investigator, Orange County Associate Defender, Santa Ana, CA Orangedale AF A defense investigator’s hard work in the field means nothing if it cannot survive the courtroom. Whether you are called to impeach a witness or enter your own due diligence into evidence, your testimony is the bridge between the investigation and the jury. This session teaches you how to build a foundation for successful testimony long before you take the stand. Participants will learn how intentional fieldwork, meticulous documentation, and bulletproof report writing directly correlate to courtroom success. You will master the psychological and tactical skills needed to project	Discovery Organization, OneNote & Templates McKayla Moran, Supervisory Investigator, Public Defender Service, Washington, DC Citrus Room OneNote can be much more than a place to take simply notes; it can become your go-to tool for organizing cases, managing discovery, and keeping all information needed in one place. This session will cover practical ways to build an organized case file, create reusable templates, and develop workflows that save time and make information easier to find. However, this is not a session solely dedicate to OneNote, as other templates, record trackers, and discovery organization tips and tricks will be discussed. Attendees will leave with tools they can immediately apply to their own cases.	Video Evidence and Law Enforcement: Best Practices vs Real World Joshua Cohen, Principal, Fat Pencil Studio, Portland, OR Orangedale BE See Session Description from Day 1 (10:45am Breakout). Repeat Session from Day 1
--	---	---



NATIONAL DEFENDER INVESTIGATOR ASSOCIATION
2026 REGIONAL CONFERENCE
Scottsdale, AZ



“Defend with Purpose: Magnificence in Maricopa”

credibility, survive aggressive cross-examination, and serve as a reliable partner to the defense attorney under high-stress trial conditions.		
New Session Format: Mitigation/Visual Advocacy Focused Breakout – but all are welcome to attend! Equipment, Filming, and Interviewing Techniques (Production) Doug Passon, President & Creative Director, Doug Passon Law, Scottsdale, AZ Sunset Room This session is specific to the preparation of mitigation films for use in plea negotiations, sentencing, and post-conviction relief. The presenter will demonstrate the equipment he uses, including lighting, microphone, camera, tripod, etc. There is also a portion about low-budget add-ons for smartphone filming, and we will discuss how to choose the right location for filming, and how to position lights camera and microphone for optimal look and sound. The presenter will also discuss best practices in preparing for and conducting on-camera interviews.		
2:30 pm – 2:45 pmNetworking Break, Exhibits		
2:45 pm – 4:00 pmCONCURRENT SESSIONS		
Collaborative Mitigation: How the Whole Team Contributes to Developing a Client’s Story Matt Silverman, Mitigation Specialist/Investigator, Silverman Mitigation, Phoenix, AZ Orangedale AF Mitigation investigation is a team discipline, not a solo assignment. This session explores how investigators, mitigation specialists, paralegals, attorneys, and experts function as co-strategists rather than in a hierarchy of tasks. Participants will examine how the full defense team, not just the mitigation specialist, builds the client's life history and shapes a persuasive, evidence-grounded narrative for sentencing.	Case Lab Matt Hanna, Training Director, NDIA, Washington, DC Seana Holland, Director of Investigations, Levy Firestone Muse LLP, Washington, DC Citrus Room What to do when you’re stuck on a case, unsure where to look next, or wondering whether you’ve overlooked an investigative avenue? In this interactive session, participants are invited to bring a current case, investigative challenge, or difficult task to the group. Working collaboratively, we’ll brainstorm investigative strategies, identify potential leads and new sources of information, explore alternative approaches, and develop practical next steps. Reminder to please be mindful of client/case confidences when sharing information.	More Than the Worst Moment: Empathy and Self-Care When Working with Individuals Charged with Sex Crimes Lee Anne Brantley, MSW, Investigator, Trial Unit, Federal Defender, Middle District of Alabama, Montgomery, AL Ashley Edwards, LICSW, Investigator, Trial Unit, Federal Defender, Middle District of Alabama, Montgomery, AL Orangedale BE Our presenters play the dual role of investigator and social worker in the civil rights hub of Montgomery. Leaning on this dual role experience, this session will provide strategies for supporting clients who have been charged with sex-related offenses. The session will also explore self-care in response to immediate and long-term secondary trauma and provide participants the opportunity to talk through various case scenarios.
New Session Format: Mitigation/Visual Advocacy Focused Breakout – but all are welcome to attend! Editing (Post-Production) Doug Passon, President & Creative Director, Doug Passon Law, Scottsdale, AZ Sunset Room In this session, the presenter will provide participants an overview of Adobe Premiere editing software, which includes demonstrating how to ingest and transcribe interviews, organize media, and do basic editing. The session will focus on the 10 most important things an editor needs to know to complete the project including titles, transitions, audio transitions, adding b-roll, adding music, adding motion to photos, and advanced techniques for more seamless cuts between clips.		