

2023 CTE Leadership Collaborative Convening Speakers

Opening Remarks

Jacob Fraire, President, ECMC Foundation

With more than 35 years of professional experience in higher education, philanthropy and public policy advocacy, Jacob Fraire became president of ECMC Foundation in February 2023. Here, he leads the Foundation's strategic grantmaking and investing to transform the postsecondary ecosystem and improve higher education and career outcomes for students from underserved backgrounds.

Before joining the Foundation, Mr. Fraire served as director of policy and strategy for the Diana Natalicio Institute at the University of Texas at El Paso. Previously, Mr. Fraire was president and CEO of the Texas Association of Community Colleges (TACC) where he represented the presidents and chancellors of the state's 50 public community college districts, which enroll more than 700,000 students.

Under his leadership, TACC secured policymaker support for state policies and funding in favor of community college students, including the creation of the Texas Commission on Community College Finance and legislative approval for the Texas Reskilling and Upskilling through Education program, authorizing short-term credentials for adult learners. Mr. Fraire also provided leadership to advance statewide implementation of guided pathways reforms to improve completion rates, post-graduation success and other student outcomes. Mr. Fraire co-led a statewide collaboration that resulted in legislative approval of student transfer policy and a corresponding state framework for transfer efficacy. He also led efforts to realize legislation to implement co-requisite instruction to accelerate the completion of developmental education.

Before joining TACC, Mr. Fraire served as vice president of philanthropy at Trellis Company (formerly Texas Guaranteed Student Loan Corporation). As the chief architect of corporate philanthropy, Mr. Fraire stewarded \$80 million in competitive grants to advance college access, need-based financial aid, student success and research. His leadership led to the creation of today's Trellis Foundation. Mr. Fraire also provided leadership to the company's operational programs supporting college access and persistence, financial education, and default prevention and management services for institutions.

For a decade, Mr. Fraire served in multiple policy advocacy roles in Washington, D.C. He served as director of legislation and policy analysis at the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, as the senior legislative coordinator at a firm representing research-intensive universities, and separately as principal of a firm representing multiple guaranty agencies in the Federal Family Education Loan Program.

Mr. Fraire has served on multiple national and state boards, including Grantmakers for Education, the Institute for Higher Education Policy (board chair), the Advisory Board for the Community College Research Center, the federal Committee on Measures of Student Success, the Corporate Advisory Committee of the Council for Opportunity in Education, the TACC Business Advisory Council, the Texas Transfer Working Group and the Texas Dual Credit Task Force.

The son of migrant farmworkers, Mr. Fraire grew up in El Paso, Texas. He holds a bachelor of science from St. Edward's University and a master of public affairs from the University of Texas at Austin. He and his wife, Virginia, have five adult children.

Keynote

Dr. Nicole Smith, Research Professor & Chief Economist, Georgetown University, Center on Education & the Workforce

Nicole Smith is a Research Professor and Chief Economist at the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce where she leads CEW's econometric and methodological work. Dr. Smith has developed a framework for restructuring long-term occupational and educational projections. This framework forms the underlying methodology for a report that projects education demand for occupations in the US economy through 2031. She is part of a team of economists working on a project to map, forecast and monitor human capital development and career pathways.

Plenary Speakers

Plenary Session: Open Futures: Education, Workforce and the Power of Community, Open Systems and Career Connected Learning

Joe Garcia, Colorado Community College System

Joe Garcia is the Chancellor of the Colorado Community College System. Prior to his role at CCCS, Garcia served as President of the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education.

From 2011 to 2016, he served as the Lt. Governor of Colorado and as the Executive Director of the Colorado Department of Higher Education. During his time as Lt. Governor, Garcia focused on increasing equity in outcomes for all students, particularly those from low-income backgrounds and communities of color.

Garcia also served as President of Colorado State University-Pueblo from 2006 to 2010 and Pikes Peak State College from 2001 to 2006.

Landon Mascareñaz, Chair, Colorado Community College Board

Landon is an educator, writer, and democracy builder. As cofounder of the Open Systems Institute, he partners with leaders around the country to encourage an emerging discipline for openers everywhere. He is the current elected chair of the Colorado State Board for Community Colleges & Occupational Education, appointed by Colorado Governor Jared Polis. He also serves as chair of the Reisher Scholars Program, supporting students across the state to achieve their higher education goals. His new book, *The Open System: Redesigning Education & Reigniting Democracy* was released by Harvard Education Press this June. He is senior partner at the Colorado Education Initiative (CEI) where he is responsible for community-driven economic development through breakthrough partnerships in the Homegrown Talent Initiative, working in sixty rural districts across eight regions of the state. In his previous role at CEI he helped assemble the Sin Fronteras Education Partnership, a coalition of local, regional, and national organizations co-creating family partnership strategies for New Mexico communities, and he supported the launch of Colorado's Statewide Family Engagement Center.

During the first six months of the COVID crisis, Landon worked with community organizations to deploy the Denver Metro Emergency Food Network, which delivered over 320 thousand free meals to families and

elderly people in need. At the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, he worked with friends and partners to help launch Palaces for People to house refugees.

He has previously led partnerships at A+ Colorado, served as a leader in the family engagement department in Denver Public Schools, co-designed the launch of the NACA Inspired Schools Network (a network of indigenous serving schools), led Teach For America-New Mexico, and taught first grade on the Navajo Nation. In 2015 he completed his doctorate at the Harvard Graduate School of Education with a focus on boundary-spanning leadership.

Landon was born in California, raised in Colorado, attended college in Oregon, and began his professional career in New Mexico—leading him to consider the western United States his home. He lives in Denver, Colorado, with his wife and enjoys traveling, learning about ancient history, and developing his meditation practice.

Concurrent Session Facilitators

Data-Informed Change in Community Colleges: Leading through Clarity, Capacity-Building, Collaboration, and Communication

Dr. Carrie Klein, Associate Vice President, State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO)

Carrie Klein is an associate vice president in SHEEO's Washington, D.C., office, having joined the team in May 2021. She leads SHEEO's Strong Foundation survey and reporting project, through which she advances SHEEO's efforts to promote effective use of state postsecondary data resources and P20W connections. Building on prior postsecondary institutional experience and analytics research, Dr. Klein develops productive relationships with partner organizations and provides relevant content expertise and technical assistance to state agency research and data policymakers to improve state and student outcomes. Her current research focuses on state and institutional policy and practice related to postsecondary data collection, use, governance, privacy, and cross-sector interactions. Before joining SHEEO, Dr. Klein was a senior fellow and higher education lead on the Future of Privacy Forum's youth and education data privacy team. She also worked as a strategic planning project manager in George Mason University's (GMU) offices of the President and University Life. Dr. Klein is an affiliate faculty member and graduate (PhD and MAIS) of GMU's Higher Education Program, where she produced numerous journal articles on postsecondary institutional use of learning and advising analytics. She earned her B.A. in classics and anthropology at The University of Arizona. Outside of work, Dr. Klein is an avid Doctor Who fan, a competitive outrigger canoe paddler, a certified yoga instructor, and loves to read and travel.

Fortifying our Pipeline: Community-Driven Apprenticeships

M. Tamara Brummer, Founder & CEO, The Luminary Lab

Tamara Brummer has spent more than 20 years building transformative and impactful relationships rooted in building a more just and equitable society. This includes tenures as the Northeast Regional Community Engagement Coordinator for the AFL-CIO, the largest federation of labor unions in the Nation. Tamara coached local and national labor leaders as they experimented with strategies and tactics to build transformational community-labor coalitions. This included creating innovative pre-apprenticeship programs across industries and sectors.

Most recently, Tamara served as Senior Advisor for National Outreach and Engagement and part of the executive leadership team for Demand Justice, one of the leading organizations advocating for court expansion and reform.

In 2023 Tamara founded the Luminary Lab, a social impact consulting firm focused on highlighting innovative strategies and impactful outcomes. By combining real-world experience with data and unconventional thinking, the Luminary Lab empowers their clients to think creatively and act boldly.

Tamara currently serves as Chair of the Unemployed Workers United Advisory Council and Chair of the State Democracy Project board. She also serves as a mentor for senior staff at Unemployed Workers United. Tamara was raised in Indianapolis, Indiana, making her a true Midwest child. With pit stops in Cincinnati and New York, she now calls Washington, D.C. home.

Leveraging Professional Development Learning in Advancing Equity Focused Change

Dr. Rebecca Vasquez Ortiz, Santa Ana College, California

Rebecca Vasquez Ortiz currently serves as a Leadership Advisor for the Regional Leaders of Open Education (RLOE) and an Associate Professor of Psychology at Santa Ana College. Dr. Vasquez Ortiz has done consulting work for HeadStart, Merage Foundation, Lumen Learning, and various local Community Service Organizations. With over 30 years in the field of psychology, her work includes early childhood education, family studies, quantitative analysis, and multicultural psychology. As an educator and researcher, she centers her work in the Social Sciences on student empowerment and community wealth models. Dr. Vasquez Ortiz has spoken and done workshops on building equitable spaces for marginalized communities across mainland Turtle Island and Hawaii. Dr. Vasquez Ortiz holds a bachelor's degree in psychology with a minor in ethnic studies, a Master's degree in psychology and a PhD in developmental psychology from the University of California, Riverside. Aside from her work in the field of developmental psychology, she has a passion for both dual-enrollment and Open Education. Dr. Vasquez Ortiz is a First Nations woman from California, where she and her partner raised their four children. She currently has the incredible honor of grandparenting her first grandchild.

Activating Research to Advance Change in Post Secondary CTE

Dr. Scott Solberg, Center for Future Readiness, Boston University

Dr. V. Scott H. Solberg Ph.D, is Professor at the Boston University Wheelock College of Education and Human Development and Vice-President for Research for the Coalition for Career Development Center. The Coalition is an industry-led effort to make career readiness the number one priority in education. Dr. Solberg is working internationally and nationally on the design, implementation, and evaluation of effective career development programs and services, especially for high-need youth and young adult populations, including people with disabilities. Currently he is co-leading a multi-country effort to build educator capacity to engage in social emotional learning. This SEL effort has been recognized by World Educational Research Association as an International Research Network. His publications, reports, and curriculum translate career development research into practice and policy strategies that are being used by states and districts throughout the United States. His most recent book is "Making School Relevant with Individualized Learning Plans: Helping Students Create Their Own Career and Life Goals" from Harvard Education Press. He is author of Success Highways, an SEL/Resiliency assessment and program available from Intellispark, co-editor of the "Handbook of Career and Workforce Development: Research, Practice and Policy" from Routledge, and co-editor of "Careers for Students with Special Educational Needs: Perspectives on Development and Transitions from the Asia-Pacific Region" from Springer.

Informing Postsecondary CTE with Real-Time Employer Insight

Niki DaSilva, US Chamber of Commerce Foundation

Niki DaSilva serves as senior director of programs and policy at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, working to strengthen the nation's educational standards and the quality of its workforce. Her primary objective is to support the Chamber Foundation's Talent Pipeline Management® (TPM) initiative by empowering employers with their data to develop sustainable talent supply chains with training and education partners that, in turn, not only build a better workforce, but better communities. For the past two years, she has led the digital transformation of the Chamber Foundation's TPM Academy® to an online on-demand learning platform, coined TPM Co/Lab™. She also serves as a faculty member for both the TPM Academy and Institute for Organization Management (IOM).

Before joining the Chamber Foundation, DaSilva worked for the State of Indiana as legislative assistant to the chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee and aided the committee in crafting the state's \$34 billion biennial budget. In addition, her portfolio included school funding, tax and fiscal policy, education and workforce development, and health care.

DaSilva is a 2014 graduate of The Fund for American Studies (TFAS) and 2018 graduate of the Indiana Leadership Forum (ILF). She has served as an advisory board member for The Children's Bureau of Indiana, and a board member and fellow for Partners of the Americas.

She received her BA in sociology from Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), where she served two terms as student government president. DaSilva continued her studies at Indiana University and pursued a dual MBA/MS in global supply chain management from the Kelley School of Business.

In her spare time, DaSilva enjoys making french pastry and staying active with skydiving, scuba diving, and snowboarding.

Strategies to Address CTE Faculty Shortage

James Bartlett, Old Dominion University

Dr. James Bartlett, II, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor in the Community College Leadership program at Old Dominion University specializing in Postsecondary CTE and Workforce Development. Dr. Bartlett serves as a research affiliate with the Center for Community College Student Engagement and executive director of the Association for Career and Technical Education Research (ACTER). He previously served a faculty member and Director of the Community College Leadership program and Community College and Career Education program coordinator at NC State University.

James was co-pi on the grant that founded the Belk Center for Community College Leadership and Research and served as the Director of Academic Programs. He has served as a faculty member at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, and a research associate for the Office of Community College Research and Leadership and the National Center for Career and Technical Education. Dr. Bartlett has over 20 years of experience in postsecondary career and technical education and has chaired over 75 dissertations. He has over 13 million dollars of funded research and currently leads the Postsecondary Career and Technical Education Research Fellows program funded by the EMCF Foundation. James has taught courses in workforce and talent development, research methods, and improvement science. James holds a bachelor's and a master's degree in business education and a Ph.D. in Human Resource Education and Workforce Development from Louisiana State University.

Michael Connet, ACTE

Michael Connet is the Associate Deputy Executive Director of Outreach and Partner Development at the Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE®). In this role, Michael is responsible for promoting the impact of high-quality CTE on America's learners and supporting the development and growth of the Associations' service to 200,000+ professionals engaged in preparing America's next generation of workers. Michael leads the Associations' efforts to build relationships that harness the potential of career and technical education and create projects and initiatives that elevate the profession. Michael formerly served as the Senior Director of Programs and Communications. Prior to joining ACTE, Michael coordinated educational technology programs at community colleges in Iowa and South Carolina, was an executive with public television overseeing education outreach and led two Fortune-50 telecommunications/technology companies charitable Foundations in their efforts to support education. A frequent author and speaker on educational excellence, Michael resides in the Washington, DC area with his wife, a lifelong educator. Michael can be contacted at mconnet@acteonline.org or via LinkedIn.

Michelle Bartlett, Old Dominion University

Michelle Bartlett, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor at Old Dominion University. Prior to her role at ODU, she worked at North Carolina State University where she led the master's in Training and Development and co-lead the doctoral program in community college leadership. Dr. Bartlett served as Coordinator of Competency-Based Education Initiatives for the College of Education and as a faculty scholar at the Belk Center for Community College Leadership and Research. Michelle has taught advanced instructional design, research methods, workforce development, and leadership courses. She has chaired 28 doctoral dissertations and continues to work with many of her past students. Michelle was selected to be a Digital Education and Learning Technology Applications (DELTA) faculty fellow, Office of Faculty Development fellow, and a Provost faculty fellow. Michelle is a past editor for the Career and Technical Education Research (CTER) Journal. She currently serves as the Professional Development Trustee for the Association for Career and Technical Education Research. Michelle Master's from the University of Louisville in Human Resource Education and her Ph.D. at Clemson University in Higher Education Leadership with a cognate in statistics.

Enhancing Postsecondary CTE for Students With Intellectual DisabilitiesDrew Andrews, Florida Center for Students with Unique Abilities (FCSUA), Think College Network - CTE Collaborative Workgroup Lead, University of Central Florida

W. Drew Andrews, EdD. is the Assistant Director at the Florida Center for Students with Unique Abilities at the University of Central Florida. He received his undergraduate in Special Education and master's degrees in Educational Leadership from the University of North Florida and specialist and Ed.D. in Education from the University of Florida. While at UF, he directed a statewide technical assistance center for secondary transition for students with disabilities and worked with the Florida Department of Education to increase the number of students with disabilities participating in career and technical education. Drew has also developed transition programs for students ages 18-22 on a technical college campus. He coordinated secondary transition services for one of Florida's very large districts where through a grant with the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council students earned career and technical education hours and industry recognized credentials in programs at a state college. Drew has been with the Florida Center for Students with Unique Abilities at the University of Central Florida for over six years where his focus is expanding postsecondary opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities throughout Florida at technical colleges, state colleges, and universities through the development of Florida Postsecondary Comprehensive

Transition Programs. Drew also serves as the Think College Inclusive Higher Education Network - Career and Technical Education Collaborative Workgroup lead. The CTE workgroup's goal is to expand access to and increase inclusive postsecondary programs available for students with intellectual disabilities.

Christian Zimmerman, Technical Assistance Coordinator, Florida Center for Students with Unique Abilities

Christian Zimmerman is one of the Technical Assistance Coordinators for the Florida Center for Students with Unique Abilities (FCSUA), where he works with existing and potential technical colleges to develop their Florida Postsecondary Transition Programs (FPCTPs). Christian earned a Master of Educational Leadership from the American College of Education and a Bachelor of Arts in English from the University of South Florida. Christian is also a doctoral student at UCF, where he is working on his Ed.D in Exceptional Student Education. Prior to joining FCSUA, Christian was the program coordinator of the How I Reach Employment (HIRE) Program on the campuses of Ft. Myers Technical College and Cape Coral Technical College. Christian is originally from Oregon, but he has lived all over the world and still enjoys traveling whenever he has the chance. In his free time, Christian enjoys reading, watching plays (anything Shakespeare), and spending time with his family.

Meeting the Moment: AI Automation and the Opportunities within Career and Technical Education

Tiffany Hsieh, Director of innovation programs at JFFLabs at Jobs for the Future

Tiffany Hsieh is director of innovation programs at JFFLabs. She works with innovative organizations to test and scale new models for learning and workforce development. Tiffany has over ten years of experience working with corporations, nonprofits, and startups to drive growth and impact outcomes. Before joining JFF, she worked at Guild to design education benefits and upskilling programs for large corporations. Prior to that, she strategic consulting engagements at Accenture and Entangled Solutions, helping organizations define their go-to-market and investment strategies. She began her career driving equitable outcomes for students in the K-12 space, first as a middle school special education teacher and then as a researcher. Tiffany has an MBA from Duke University's Fuqua School of Business and a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of California, Berkeley. She lives in Portland, Oregon, with her husband and daughter. In her free time, she can be found trying out new recipes, exploring the outdoors, and dabbling in sprint triathlons.

Win-Win: How Employers and Community Colleges are Building the Diverse Future Workforce

Crystal Davidson, Vice President, iBuild

Crystal Davidson is the Vice President of iBuild Florida. She is responsible for creating the blueprint and building the commitment that leads the Florida construction industry toward the fulfillment of creating a sustainable workforce pipeline of skilled tradespeople. Her goal is to build a seamless and exciting career path for the trades with an emphasis on apprenticeship training models.

She is an executive level trainer, educator, and information architect who works with business leaders, government officials, and educationalist to develop educational and training programs in a variety of incumbencies. After spending nearly two decades bridging the gap between performance in public education and meeting the instructional and training needs of the business community, Crystal is a subject matter expert who employs innovative strategies for designing and developing curricula and ensuring that students are successful in achieving the desired learning outcomes that lead to gainful and productive employment. Crystal knows that her mission isn't simply to generate revenue, but to impact and empower the lives of people every day. She has received many awards such as Administrator of the Year and the FHSAA Coach of

the year to name a few. She currently serves as the Vice President of iBuild Central Florida, member of the West Orange Habitat for Humanity Board of Directors, Past President of the Orange County Association of School Administrators and a member of the West Orange Chamber of Commerce Economic and Governmental Advocacy Committee.

Crystal holds a Bachelor of Science in Business Management from Auburn University and a Master of Science in Educational Leadership from Nova Southeastern University.

FAFSA Changes & Opportunities

Zenia Henderson, Chief Program Officer, National College Attainment Network (NCAN)

As NCAN's Chief Program Officer, Zenia Henderson is responsible for implementing NCAN's member engagement and retention strategy and building the capacity of those members through professional development, support services, and networking opportunities. She helps develop and vet tools, resources, and effective practices most valuable for practitioners in the field of postsecondary attainment. Before joining NCAN, Henderson served as the Senior Director of Programs for NCAN member CollegeTracks in Montgomery County, MD, where she provided strategic and data-driven programmatic oversight of the college access and success programs operating in several Montgomery County Public High Schools. With over 15 years in the nonprofit sector, Henderson has an extensive background in the field of college access, persistence and completion. Her firsthand experience as a first-generation college graduate led her to pursue endeavors with organizations that afford first-generation and students from low-income backgrounds the opportunity to pursue higher education, such as with NCAN member College Summit, now PeerForward, where she worked regionally and nationally to recruit volunteers for seven regions across the country. In addition to her work as a certified youth facilitator with PeerForward, she has a range of experience in leadership development, nonprofit management and direct service experience with various nonprofit and federal programs such as the Latin American Youth Center and Communities in Schools as well as Trio programs such as Student Support Services and Upward Bound. Henderson completed her undergraduate studies with a bachelor's degree in English and Ethnic Studies from the University of Colorado at Boulder and holds a master's degree in Organizational Management from Trinity Washington University. She lives in Maryland with her husband and two sons.

Workshop Facilitators

Charting the Course: Your Life, Your Career, Your Way

Jolea Payne, Founder & CEO Inspire Consulting

Jolea is a spirited speaker, trainer, facilitator, and coach with more than 17 years of experience in the nonprofit and public sectors. She is the Founder and Chief Community Builder of Inspirit, a Black woman-owned coaching and consulting firm that provides training and support to nonprofits, community-based organizations, and changemakers. Jolea launched Inspirit to address the need for critical values- and culture-aligned systems and programs in social impact organizations where she observed severe overwhelm, burnout, and turnover among staff and volunteers and disengagement among partners and community members. Through Inspirit, Jolea combines her knowledge and expertise in nonprofit leadership, operations, and programming with her deep personal commitment to centering community, pursuing justice, and building belonging for those who have been institutionally and systemically marginalized. As an enthusiastic

thought partner and encourager, Jolea is energized by the SPARK that comes from collaborating with values-aligned community partners to take an idea from conception to completion. Her access point to nonprofit and community-based work was at a grassroots, environmental justice organization located in Atlanta, GA, nearly two decades ago, where she worked closely with community residents to design and implement educational programming for an outdoor activity center and surrounding nature preserve in a predominant Black community in Southwest Atlanta. This was her first time experiencing SPARK in a work environment, and it put her on a path to discovering her heart-work.

Jolea returned to her hometown of Houston, TX, to give back to her community and has worked for small and large nonprofits, social enterprises, and multi-entity organizations leading work in environment, K-12, higher education, workforce development, and government. The thread unifying all of Jolea's work is her commitment to community.

Jolea currently serves on the Board of Directors for Bayou City Waterkeeper and is an advisor to Black Impact Houston, an alliance of Black-led, nonprofit organizations in the Greater Houston area. When she's not working, Jolea enjoys eating good food with family and friends, dancing, watching rom-coms, reading, and looking for books to add to her TBR list.

Funding Postsecondary CTE Innovation

Kierra Goosby, Founder & CEO, GoldenRod Consultants

Ms. Kierra Goosby worked in the nonprofit sector for eight years before founding Golden Rod Consultants, LLC in 2021 to help small businesses and nonprofit organizations expand their revenue streams through grant funding. She draws on her lived experiences as a Grant Writer, Grant Administrator, Grant Reviewer, Project Manager, and Program Manager when she advises her clients about whether, when, why, and how to apply for grant funding they are likely to win. She has secured funding to support food sovereignty, emergency preparedness, school administration, in-school programming, out-of-school programming, postsecondary workforce education, whole-child support, and community engagement.

Working With State Legislatures to Advance Postsecondary CTE Policy and Drive Local Change

Sunny Deye, Associate Director, Education- National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL)

Sunny Deye, Associate Director at the National Conference of State Legislatures, leads NCSL's postsecondary education team in tracking and analyzing postsecondary education legislation in all 50 states, publishing state policy issue briefs and reports, developing professional development opportunities for state legislators and legislative staff, and conducting NCSL's annual Legislative Institute on Higher Education. Sunny has 20+ years of experience working with state legislators and legislative staff on K-12 and higher education state policy.

Andrew Smalley, Policy Specialist, Education- National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL)

Andrew Smalley works on postsecondary education topics and at NCSL. Prior to joining NCSL, he was a legislative intern for three years at the Colorado General Assembly, working with legislators and a lobbying firm. He received his MPP and a BA in political science and public policy from the University of Denver.

Overcoming Uncomfortable Truths: How to Have Difficult Conversations and Maintain Professional Momentum

Gianina Baker, Assistant Director, Office of Community College Research and Leadership, Education Policy, Organization and Leadership, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

Dr. Gianina Baker is the associate director of evaluation, learning, and equitable assessment at the Office of Community College Research and Leadership. She supports and promotes OCCRL through her project management work of the REACH Collaborative. She also assists at OCCRL with assessment/evaluation consulting services, public engagement, and the organization's research agenda. Prior to her current role, Dr. Baker served as the acting director of the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment, a research-resource organization that provides thought leadership and technical assistance to colleges and universities nationally and is geared toward the assessment of student learning. Previously, Dr. Baker served as the director of institutional effectiveness & planning, director of institutional research, and as a counselor, all positions at Richland Community College. Dr. Baker earned a Ph.D. in Educational Organization & Leadership from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, a Master of Arts in Human Development Counseling from Saint Louis University, and a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from Illinois Wesleyan University.

Action Learning Facilitators

Sherazade Langlade-Hunter, Chief Executive Officer, Workforce Professionals Training Institute

Sherazade Langlade (she/her) joined WPTI as CEO in 2022, having previously served as Deputy Executive Director in 2013-2014 and remaining an enthusiastic supporter and advocate for the organization since. Throughout her 20+ year career, she has consistently worked in, and partnered with, workforce development and financial inclusion mission driven organizations. As a first-generation immigrant she learned firsthand that the “land of opportunities” was not inclusive of all and has committed her career to strengthening, innovating and transforming the trajectory of individuals, and the organizations that serve them. In her expansive career she served in direct service functions - designing and implementing programs, fundraising, partnering with boards, and designing strategy for growth and impact. Additionally, she has also served as a change management, strategy, organizational development and business development consultant, trainer and coach to dozens of nonprofit clients. Some of the organizations where she has contributed to their growth and success are Upwardly Global, NYC Mayor’s Office of Talent & Workforce Development, JobsFirstNYC and most recently at Community Resource Exchange. She brings her deep knowledge in social enterprise/business development, organizational design and operations, leadership and change management to WPTI, with a goal to inspire ambitious strategies to best achieve WPTI’s critical mission. Sherazade is a National Urban Fellow; received her MPA from the Marxe School of Public and International Affairs, Baruch College, and B.A from St. John’s University. She holds certifications from PROSCI, Change Management Practitioner; Blooming Willow, Healing-Centered Coach Certification; Clark-Wilson Group, Survey of Management Practices. She is a bi-racial, white presenting, first generation immigrant cis-woman; lives in the Bronx with her spouse, and is proud to be step-parent, daughter, twin sister and auntie. She’ll never say no to a cortado, sharing travel tales or planning big ideas.

Najmah Ahmad, Founder & CEO of The Chisholm Group

Najmah Ahmad serves as the Founder & CEO of the Chisholm Group LLC. The Chisholm Group is an economic justice organization committed to real impact and systemic transformation through educational & workforce opportunity, strategic partnerships, and entrepreneurship. Najmah has been working in education and youth development for 15 years; this includes experiences at Institutes of Higher Education, Non-profit organizations, and at the K-12 district level. Najmah earned her Bachelor’s degree in Sociology and Gender & Diversity Studies from Xavier University and her Master’s degree in College Student Affairs from Nova

Southeastern University. During her time working with the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), Najmah created the Career Ready Internship program that grew to employ nearly 1,000 youth in paid internships connected to their career education program of study. Najmah developed employer partnerships with over 200 industry leaders. She also led the writing of the Tenacity Employability Skills Curriculum which incorporated workforce development and social emotional learning models. With a desire to expand equitable access to postsecondary opportunities, Najmah created the DCPS Career Bridge program which worked with seniors from underserved communities, at-risk of not graduating, in a year-round mentoring/ career coach initiative. Prior to forming the Chisholm Group LLC., Najmah continued this work at the national level with the Council of Chief State School Officers as the Director of Career Readiness Initiatives, working with State Education Agency leaders in the New Skills for Youth Initiative and National Career Readiness Collaborative. Najmah has provided targeted technical assistance, led states through intensive strategic planning, goal setting and sustainability planning with the goal of ensuring that all students are career ready and have access to economic opportunity.

Najmah founded The Chisholm Group in 2021 and continues this systemic economic justice work in communities across the country. This experience, along with a desire to have more Black women and Women of Color at the table, and their expertise in solving complex problems; Najmah began coaching women from these populations on how to find joy and freedom through entrepreneurship. She has helped more than two dozen women begin or expand their own businesses through the lens of strategy, mindfulness, and abundance.

Sabeen Pirani, Chief Learning Officer, Workforce Professionals Training Institute

With over 16 years of experience in youth and workforce development prior to joining WPTI in 2016, Sabeen Pirani brings a wealth of front-line and leadership experience to her role as Chief Learning Officer. She oversaw the daily operations of The Door's Bronx Youth Center; managed a "Learning to Work" program site, created a Sheltered Internship Program model for young adults with a dual diagnosis, and placed hundreds of young people into internships and employment at FECS Health and Human Services; and helped young people launch social ventures through Ashoka's Youth Venture. She earned a BS in Public Health Education from Indiana University.

Cynthia Oliver, Head of US Market, MagnoliaTree

Cynthia Oliver is an Organizational Psychology and Development practitioner. Throughout her career, she has driven organizational growth and transformation through the lens of human-centered development. Her approach is rooted in uncovering insights from individuals as the starting place for organizational transformation. She strives to create impact for organizations by creating space for human growth, shared reflection, and collaborative discovery. Before her work with MagnoliaTree, Cynthia served as a leader and practitioner at a number of consultancies, including her own practice, MoonRising Collaborative. She also served as a practitioner for the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, working with internal teams leading organizational development and change management programs. Cynthia is a Puerto Rican native and currently lives in New York. She is a mom to twin daughters in college and can often be found either painting or volunteering for animal rescue organizations.