



AEO REGIONAL COUNCILS SUMMIT

LEVERAGING REGIONALISM TO
EMPOWER SMALL BUSINESSES

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB / MAY 2, 2024
12:30PM - 4:30PM EDT

DIGITAL PROGRAM

AGENDA

01.

Welcome Remarks

1:00 PM - 1:15 PM

02.

Conversation w/ EDA Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Economic Development, Alejandra Y. Castillo

1:15 PM - 1:40 PM

03.

State Economic Development Panel Discussion

1:50 PM - 2:40 PM

04.

Local Economic Development Panel Discussion

2:45 PM - 3:35 PM

05.

Conversation on Sustainability and Inclusion for Small Businesses

3:45 PM - 4:20 PM

06.

Closing Remarks

4:20 PM - 4:30 PM



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AGENDA

01. 1:00 – 1:15 PM | WELCOME REMARKS

Natalie Madeira Cofield, President & CEO | Association for Enterprise Opportunity (AEO)



NATALIE MADEIRA COFIELD

PRESIDENT & CEO / ASSOCIATION FOR
ENTERPRISE OPPORTUNITY (AEO)

02. 1:15 – 1:40 PM | CONVERSATION W/ EDA ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF COMMERCE FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ALEJANDRA Y. CASTILLO

Join us for an enlightening Fireside Chat featuring Natalie Madeira Cofield, President and CEO of AEO, and the U.S. Economic Development’s Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Economic Development, Alejandra Y. Castillo, as they explore the vital role of small businesses in regional economies. We’ll explore the significance of regionalism and its relevance in the current landscape. Together, they will unpack why a national strategy necessitates efficacy at the regional level. This promises to be a compelling conversation on the indispensable synergy between national vision and regional action.

- **Natalie Madeira Cofield**, President & CEO | Association for Enterprise Opportunity (AEO)
- **Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Economic Development Alejandra Y. Castillo**, U.S. Economic Development Administration



**ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF COMMERCE
FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT,
ALEJANDRA Y. CASTILLO**

U.S. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION



NATALIE MADEIRA COFIELD

PRESIDENT & CEO / ASSOCIATION FOR
ENTERPRISE OPPORTUNITY (AEO)



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AGENDA

03. 1:50 – 2:40 PM | STATE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PANEL DISCUSSION

The panel discussion will explore the complex landscape of the small business ecosystem at the state level, providing insights into the challenges and opportunities that these businesses encounter. Industry experts will discuss regulatory obstacles, access to funding, and market competition, sharing strategies and innovative approaches to foster environments conducive to small business success. The session will offer attendees a chance to understand the unique dynamics within different states and equip them with actionable insights and practical solutions for navigating the small business sector. Ideal for policymakers, entrepreneurs, and small business advocates, this discussion promises to deepen understanding and facilitate meaningful connections with industry leaders. Join us to gain valuable perspectives and drive impactful change in the state's small business ecosystem.

Moderated by:

- **Todd Greene**, Vice President and Executive Director, WorkRise | Urban Institute

Panelists:

- **Carolina Martinez**, CEO | California Association for Micro Enterprise Opportunity (CAMEO)
- **Inez Long**, President & CEO | BBIF
- **Wendy Baumann**, President & Chief Visionary Officer | The Wisconsin Women’s Business Initiative Corporation



TODD GREENE
(MODERATOR)

VP AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
WORKRISE / URBAN INSTITUTE



CAROLINA MARTINEZ

CEO / CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION FOR MICRO
ENTERPRISE OPPORTUNITY (CAMEO)



INEZ LONG

PRESIDENT & CEO / BBIF



WENDY BAUMANN

PRESIDENT & CHIEF
VISIONARY OFFICER / WWBIC



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AGENDA

04. 2:45 PM - 3:35 PM | LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PANEL DISCUSSION

Join us on a journey of local economic development and small business empowerment. We'll explore the power of local approaches, focusing on innovation and collaboration to boost small business success. Discover how community organizations adapt services based on local needs and learn strategies for responsive programming. Our panel will offer insights and case studies on fostering small business resilience and prosperity through localized approaches, emphasizing the unique challenges and opportunities within local contexts. Ideal for service providers, funders, and policymakers, this session will highlight the importance of small businesses in driving regional innovation and sustainable economic growth.

Moderated by:

- **Alison Evans**, Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Development Specialist | U.S. Small Business Administration

Panelists:

- **Brienne Maner**, President | Startup Sioux Falls
- **Daniel Flores**, VP, Government Relations | Greater Washington Board of Trade
- **John Lewis**, CEO | The Harbor Bank of Maryland
- **Jo Panzera**, Executive Director | Start Small Think Big



ALISON EVANS
(MODERATOR)
ENTREPRENEURSHIP ECOSYSTEM
DEVELOPMENT SPECIALIST /
U.S. SMALL BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION



DANIEL FLORES
VP, GOVERNMENT RELATIONS / GREATER
WASHINGTON BOARD OF TRADE



JOHN LEWIS
CEO / THE HARBOR
BANK OF MARYLAND



BRIENNE MANER
PRESIDENT / STARTUP
SIOUX FALLS



JO PANZERA
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR /
START SMALL THINK BIG



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AGENDA

05. 3:45 PM - 4:20 PM | CONVERSATION ON SUSTAINABILITY AND INCLUSION FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

In an era of profound transformation in the business landscape, prioritizing environmental sustainability and social inclusion is paramount. Join us for a discussion on the urgent need for proactive leadership within the small business ecosystem on these crucial issues. Explore why small businesses must drive meaningful change and adapt to evolving societal expectations, shaping a sustainable and inclusive future. Gain exclusive insights from AEO on equipping small businesses to navigate these shifts. Let's provoke thoughtful discourse and inspire action towards fostering a resilient, equitable business landscape.

Moderated by:

- **Chelsea Maxwell, MSW**, Sr. Research Associate | Association for Enterprise Opportunity (AEO)

Panelists:

- **Coles Jennings**, Director of Corporate Sustainability | Community Climate Collaborative (C3)
- **Scot Case**, Vice President, CSR & Sustainability | National Retail Federation



CHELSEA MAXWELL, MSW
(MODERATOR)

SR. RESEARCH ASSOCIATE /
ASSOCIATION FOR ENTERPRISE
OPPORTUNITY (AEO)



COLES JENNINGS

DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SUSTAINABILITY /
COMMUNITY CLIMATE COLLABORATIVE (C3)



SCOT CASE

VP, CSR & SUSTAINABILITY / NATIONAL
RETAIL FEDERATION (NRF)

06. 4:20 PM - 4:30 PM | CLOSING REMARKS

Natalie Madeira Cofield, President & CEO | Association for Enterprise Opportunity (AEO)



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SPEAKER BIOS



**ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF COMMERCE
FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT,
ALEJANDRA Y. CASTILLO**

U.S. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Economic Development Alejandra Y. Castillo / U.S. Economic Development Administration

Alejandra Y. Castillo was sworn in as U.S. Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Economic Development on August 13, 2021, becoming the first women of color to hold this position. In this unprecedented moment of growth and opportunity, she leads the only federal agency focused exclusively on economic development.

She guides the implementation of over \$5 billion dollars in funding, powering the U.S Economic Development Administration (EDA) and its mission to make the transformational investments in America. During the implementation of the American Rescue Plan alone, she oversaw the investment of \$3 Billion dollars across nearly 800 projects, resulting in more than 200,000 jobs secured across the nation.

As the daughter of immigrants and small business owners, her journey is the embodiment of the American Dream. Her own experiences have helped affirm her commitment to EDA’s number one funding priority: equity.

Spanning over three decades and three Presidential administrations --Biden, Obama and Clinton—her career has focused on creating equitable and inclusive opportunities for all Americans. Her career has also included shattering glass ceilings and providing inspiration to multiple generations of diverse leaders.

In 2014, Castillo was appointed by President Obama to serve as the National Director of the U.S. Department of Commerce’s Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA), the first Hispanic woman to lead the agency. Under her leadership, she expanded its effort to help Minority Business Enterprises (MBEs) gain access to capital, contracts, and business opportunities, assisting MBEs to scale.

Her commitment to ensuring opportunity for every American is reflected in her current service as Federal Co-Chair for the National Advisory Council for Innovation and Entrepreneurship and as Co-Vice Chair of the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office’s Council for Inclusive Innovation.

Castillo first joined the U.S. Department of Commerce in 2008 as a Special Advisor to the Under Secretary for the International Trade Administration. Additionally, Castillo served as a Senior Policy Analyst in the White House during the Clinton Administration. Prior to EDA, Castillo was the Chief Executive Officer of YWCA USA, where she championed the 163-year-old organization delivering critical social, educational, and economic development services throughout its 204 associations.



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SPEAKER BIOS



NATALIE MADEIRA COFIELD

**PRESIDENT & CEO / ASSOCIATION FOR
ENTERPRISE OPPORTUNITY (AEO)**

Natalie Madeira Cofield, President & CEO / Association for Enterprise Opportunity (AEO)

Natalie Madeira Cofield is an award-winning entrepreneur, philanthropist, economic development executive, and nationally regarded expert for small business and has been named one of the most powerful women in business by Entrepreneur Magazine.

Cofield is a former presidentially appointed Assistant Administrator for the U.S. Small Business Administration where she advised on the deployment of \$1.2 trillion in funding, and was the co-architect of the SBA’s Community Navigator Pilot Program, which provided \$200M in funding to ecosystems and entrepreneurs throughout the country during the greatest economic crisis in modern history. As the head of the Office of Women’s Business Ownership at SBA she was responsible for managing a grant-making budget of \$70 million and funding the largest expansion of the Women’s Business Center network in the history of SBA at 146 Centers in expanding the network to every state in the US.

From Google to the National League of Cities, Natalie’s speeches, courses, and advisory services have helped to shape programs and efforts of some of the most regarded global brands, and educational and government institutions. She is co-founder of the \$14M Coalition to Back Black Business which was responsible for funding nearly 1,000 Black-owned businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A sought-after expert, Natalie’s work has been featured on and by Inc, Time, CNN, NYTimes, Fast Company, Forbes, Entrepreneur, Business Insider, Black Enterprise, Essence, and EBONY, among others.

Once inspired by reading the business plans of her mother when she was 11, Natalie is the founder and former CEO of Walker’s Legacy, a digital platform to empower women through entrepreneurship, and its adjoined nonprofit arm, the Walker’s Legacy Foundation, which was established to empower income limited women through financial literacy and economic security. In this role, Cofield established a \$25,000 funded scholarship for enterprising women at her alma mater, Howard University.

In 2019, Cofield was named the inaugural Entrepreneur-in-Residence for the District of Columbia leading Mayor Muriel Bowser’s 202Creates Program providing entrepreneurship advice to creative economy businesses within the District of Columbia.

An honors tech graduate from Howard University (where she was mentored by CIOs of two of America’s leading Fortune 500 companies) Natalie leveraged her coding experience to build a career centered on empowering businesses, entrepreneurs, women, and underrepresented communities.

In 2023, Cofield received an honorary doctorate of humane letters from the Board of Trustees of Shaw University and served as the 2023 commencement speaker for the institution. She serves on the corporate board of directors for Harbor Bankshares Corporation.

An avid traveler, Cofield has visited more than 47 countries and counting.



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SPEAKER BIOS



TODD GREENE

VP AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, WORKRISE /
URBAN INSTITUTE

Todd Greene, VP and Executive Director, WorkRise / Urban Institute

Todd Greene is a Vice President at the Urban Institute where is also the executive director of WorkRise, a research-to-action network focused on jobs, workers, and mobility. Prior to joining Urban, Greene was executive director of the Atlanta University Center Consortium Inc. (AUCC), the world’s oldest and largest consortium of historically black colleges and universities. There he led a team that enhanced academic programs, forged interdisciplinary research, and catalyzed a broad economic development agenda. Under Greene’s leadership, AUCC engaged in thought leadership, collaboration, and strategic innovation for member institutions individually and as a collective.

For more than a decade, Greene served as a vice president in the research division of the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta. He led the economic and community development department and initiatives to promote inclusive economic growth, including community and economic development finance, small business access to credit, affordable housing strategies, and human capital and workforce development. Greene founded and led the Federal Reserve System’s Human Capital/Workforce Development Working Group and oversaw creation of the Federal Reserve Center for Workforce and Economic Opportunity.

Greene has published numerous articles and is the co-editor of two books- Transforming U.S. Workforce Development Policies for the 21st Century (2015) and Investing in America’s Workforce: Improving Outcomes for Workers and Employers (2018). He is past chairman of the board of directors of the International Economic Development Council and of the Georgia Economic Developers Association, current chair of the National Advisory Board for the Heldrich Center for Workforce Development, and serves on the boards of Corporation for a Skilled Workforce.

Greene is a certified economic developer (CEcD). He earned his undergraduate degree from Harvard University, master’s degrees from Washington University and Georgia State University, and has completed executive education programs at Stanford University Graduate School of Business and Universidad ESAN (Lima, Peru).



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SPEAKER BIOS



CAROLINA MARTINEZ

CEO / CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION FOR
MICRO ENTERPRISE OPPORTUNITY (CAMEO)

Carolina Martinez, CEO / California Association for Micro Enterprise Opportunity (CAMEO)

Carolina Martinez is the CEO of CAMEO - the California Association for Micro Enterprise Opportunity-, a statewide association that represents 400 lenders, training programs, chambers of commerce, job creators, agencies and individuals dedicated to furthering Microbusiness development in the state. CAMEO advocates for its members and builds their capacity to support the almost 200,000 very small businesses they serve.

Carolina has 20 years of experience working in economic development and business consulting. Her vision has been defined by the variety of experiences she’s had with nonprofits and universities in South and North America. She has developed bilingual, culturally appropriate entrepreneurial training programs; trained and coached pre-venture and startups; developed international networks promoting partnerships among private corporations that boost industries; provided consulting services to vulnerable communities to explore entrepreneurship as a way to generate wealth; and owned her own business consulting firm.

Carolina has served on the Pennsylvania Governor’s Advisory Commission on Latino Affairs as well as on the boards of the Berks County Latino Chamber of Commerce and the Kutztown University Foundation. She serves on the Boards of two CDFI microlenders: Mission Economic Development Agency (MEDA) and Pacific Community ventures in San Francisco. Carolina serves on the Community Advisory Boards of Comerica Bank, Umpqua Bank and Cathay Bank and is a board member of the Association for Enterprise Opportunity (AEO). She serves on the California Governor’s Entrepreneurship and Economic Mobility and is a Member of the Executive Committee and Chair of the Policy Committee of the California Coalition for Community Investment (CCCI) a statewide coalition of CDFIs. She has an MBA and BA in Industrial Engineering.



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SPEAKER BIOS



INEZ LONG

PRESIDENT & CEO / BBIF

Inez Long, President & CEO / BBIF

Long has 28 years of combined experience in the financial services industry. She began her professional career in commercial banking in Credit Management and Commercial Lending with First Union and SunTrust banks in Orlando, Florida. It was while working for them that she met Judy Jones, the former President of the Black Business Investment Fund (BBIF).

Under Long’s leadership, BBIF Florida has provided over \$47.6 million in loans to over 406 Black and minority businesses, created and sustained over 12,906 jobs all while maintaining a historical loan loss rate of approximately 4 percent; invested and leveraged \$55.2million in community economic develop projects. She has led the organization to: (1) expand its geographic service area to statewide, (2) expand its client base from Black businesses to include other minority and underserved small businesses, (3) receive two federal New Markets Tax Credits allocation of \$20 million each, two FA awards totaling \$1.9 million, and (4) be selected as one of three initial CDFI’s to be nationally recognized and received a Wells Fargo Bank Diverse Community Capital grant of \$1 million.



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SPEAKER BIOS



WENDY BAUMANN

**PRESIDENT & CHIEF VISIONARY OFFICER /
THE WISCONSIN WOMEN'S BUSINESS
INITIATIVE CORPORATION (WWBIC)**

Wendy Baumann, President & Chief Visionary Officer / The Wisconsin Women's Business Initiative Corporation (WWBIC)

Wendy Katherine Baumann serves as President/CVO of The Wisconsin Women's Business Initiative Corporation (WWBIC), a statewide economic development corporation. Baumann accepted this challenging position in the community in 1994, providing the leadership required to ensure the achievement of WWBIC's mission and to uphold the philosophy of serving businesses owned by women, minorities and low wealth individuals in Wisconsin.

Former Director of Small Business Development at The Milwaukee Enterprise Center (MEC), Wendy previously served as Executive Director of The Hispanic Chamber Of Commerce of Wisconsin in 1987 and 1988. During that time, the Chamber was honored as "Hispanic Chamber of the Year" by the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. Under her direction, the membership organization was recognized on a state and national level, increasing membership by over 500%. Baumann has also worked at The Council for the Spanish Speaking as Director of Development and Research and prior to that, as a Program Coordinator for a job placement program for disadvantaged individuals at Goodwill Industries.

Wendy has served on numerous national and local Boards including The Association of Enterprise Opportunity, Office Depot – National Women's Advisory Committee, The Association of Women's Business Centers, The National SBA Advisory Board, Johnson Bank, WHEDA, and Northern Trust – New Markets Tax Credit Boards, Federal Home Loan Bank of Chicago, The Institute of World Affairs, The Milwaukee Public Market Board, UW-Milwaukee Alumni Board, Herzing University Board, Milwaukee Metropolitan Civic Alliance, Milwaukee North Shore Rotary Club and others.

Current membership and Board service includes: Consumer Federation of America – America Saves, Governor's Council on Financial Literacy- Chair, City of Milwaukee Mayor Cavalier Johnson's Economic Advisory Board, Opportunity Finance Network, Association of Enterprise Opportunity, The Association of Women's Business Centers, Friends of SBA Microloan Program, Mission Lenders Working Group, CDFI Coalition, Kiva US Advisory Committee, Greater Milwaukee Committee, Associated Bank Advisory Board, UW- Milwaukee Women Leadership Conference Advisory Committee, Self Help Credit Union Advisory Board, Wisconsin Housing Preservation Corps, Professional Dimensions, TEMPO, Milwaukee Women, Inc., Cardinal Dery Board and others.

Baumann received both Masters and Baccalaureate from the University of Wisconsin– Milwaukee. She was honored by UW– Milwaukee as The Graduate of the Last Decade in 1998, Professional Dimension's - Sacajawea Award in 2014, BizTimes Media's Woman Executive of the year in 2017, and Association for Enterprise Opportunity Impact Award for Innovation on Main Street in 2022. Wendy has two adult daughters and sons, five grandchildren, a fabulous border collie and Australian sheperd, and resides in a log cabin in Mequon, Wisconsin.



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SPEAKER BIOS



ALISON EVANS

ENTREPRENEURSHIP ECOSYSTEM
DEVELOPMENT SPECIALIST /
U.S. SMALL BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION (SBA)

Alison Evans, Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Development Specialist / U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA)

Alison Evans is an Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Development Specialist with SBA’s Office of Investment and Innovation where she manages the Regional Innovation Cluster program. Alison was formerly a Presidential Management Fellow with the SBA and through her fellowship she worked in the Office of Investment and Innovation, Office of Women’s Business Ownership, and Office of Credit Risk Management. She also did a detail to the Department of Treasury’s Office of Recovery Programs (now Office of Capital Access) where she worked with the Interagency Community Investment Committee.

Prior to joining public service, Alison worked with Lewis-Burke Associates LLC, a government relations and consulting firm focused on higher education and science policy. Alison has spent her career in policy and is focused on community and economic development to support communities and enable people to build generational wealth and a high quality of life.

Alison has a Masters in City and Regional Planning from the Georgia Institute of Technology and a Bachelor’s of Science in Biochemistry from Arizona State University.



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SPEAKER BIOS



DANIEL FLORES

VP, GOVERNMENT RELATIONS / GREATER
WASHINGTON BOARD OF TRADE

Daniel Flores, VP, Government Relations / Greater Washington Board of Trade

Daniel Flores is the Vice President, Regional Government Relations of the Greater Washington Board of Trade. In this capacity, he serves as the chief lobbyist for the organization representing the interests of Board of Trade members in DC, Maryland, Virginia and US Congress on various issues including: transportation, affordable housing, technology and innovation, workforce and education and more. Mr. Flores has served in many leadership positions including President & CEO of the Greater Washington Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Senior Director of Outreach for the US Chamber of Commerce, Community Affairs manager for Washington Gas and appointed during DC Mayor Anthony Williams’ administration as chief of staff of the DC Public Service Commission.

Daniel has served on boards, commissions, non-profits and under three Maryland governors. Daniel volunteered at St. Martin’s Catholic Church youth group in Gaithersburg, Maryland and the Spanish Catholic Center (Catholic Charities) as he served on its board of directors, Holy Cross Hospital Board of Directors and Board Foundation, Channels 4 (NBC) and 9 (CBS) Community Advisory Boards, DC Habitat for Humanity, and Girl Scouts of Greater Washington.

In 2020 Daniel was appointed by Prince George’s County Executive Angela Alsobrooks to the Prince George’s Forward Task Force to serve in the Economic Recovery Jobs/Wealth Creation Working Group. The task force was formed to help address issues brought up by COVID-19.

Daniel’s catholic upbringing taught him the value of serving others and as such he has helped coordinate citizenship workshops, health fairs, and special events for low-income families.

Daniel is the recipient of the 2023 Presidential Lifetime Achievement Award.

Daniel is a naturalized US citizen originally from El Salvador.



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SPEAKER BIOS



JOHN LEWIS

CEO / THE HARBOR BANK OF MARYLAND

John Lewis, CEO / The Harbor Bank of Maryland

John Lewis is President and Chief Executive Officer of Harbor Bankshares Corporation and its principal banking subsidiary, The Harbor Bank of Maryland.

On April 6, 2023, Lewis became CEO of the Baltimore, Maryland-based Minority Depository Institution and Community Development Financial Institution and leads various banking and investment activities conducted through its subsidiaries and affiliates.

Lewis held various roles in the Global Wealth and Investment Management Division of Merrill Lynch. He began his tenure there as Chief Financial Officer for Bank Product Distribution in the Global Banking Group. He was previously a banker at Credit Suisse First Boston.

Lewis serves as Trustee and Investment Committee Chairman of the Maryland Teachers and State Employees Supplemental Retirement Plans and The Severn School. He formerly served as Vice Chairman of Baltimore City Community College, a designated Minority Serving Institution. Lewis is a member of the Young President’s Organization and Real Estate Executive Council.

He completed formal executive training programs at M&T Bank and Fleet Bank. He received a B.S. degree from Cornell University where he was an INROADS Scholar and MBA from Harvard Business School where he was a Robert Toigo Foundation Fellow.



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SPEAKER BIOS



BRIENNE MANER

PRESIDENT / STARTUP SIOUX FALLS

Brienne Maner, President / Startup Sioux Falls

Brienne Maner is a dedicated community advocate deeply rooted in her hometown of Sioux Falls, SD. With over a decade of experience in nonprofit leadership, Brienne has demonstrated her commitment to driving positive change and empowering others.

For the past five years, Brienne has served as the Director & President of Startup Sioux Falls, where she has led the organization through significant transformation, aligning its mission, vision, and physical presence to better serve the startup community. Under her leadership, Startup Sioux Falls has become a cornerstone for founders and startups, providing essential resources for networking, launching, and scaling ventures.

One of Brienne's most notable professional achievements occurred in 2021, when Startup Sioux Falls was selected as one of only 51 organizations nationwide to receive up to \$1M as part of the SBA Community Navigator grant pilot program. Through her strategic stewardship of these funds, Brienne has spearheaded initiatives to support underserved communities across the state, including Indigenous South Dakotans, women, veterans, New Americans, and immigrants. Her and her team's efforts have resulted in nearly 4,000 counseling hours and the training of over 400 clients in two years.

In addition to her role at Startup Sioux Falls, Brienne has held leadership positions in prominent non-profit organizations such as the Sioux Falls Jazz & Blues Society and Downtown Sioux Falls, Inc. (DTSF). Committed to making a difference beyond the boardroom, Brienne actively participates in grassroots initiatives, including an annual hygiene product donation drive for area homeless shelters. She is also a dedicated member of the Downtown Rotary Club and serves on a city of Sioux Falls advisory board, contributing her expertise to shape the Downtown 2035 Plan and development of the downtown area.

Outside of her professional endeavors, Brienne prioritizes her roles as a wife and mother, striving to lead by example for her young daughter. She is passionate about mentoring women and young professionals in her community, fostering a culture of growth and empowerment.

Brienne Maner epitomizes professionalism, dedication, and compassion in her commitment to serving Sioux Falls and beyond.



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SPEAKER BIOS



JO PANZERA
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR / START
SMALL THINK BIG

Jo Panzera, President, Executive Director / Start Small Think Big

Jo Panzera is the Executive Director of Start Small Think Big, a non profit organization that works to advance economic equity for small business owners who face systemic barriers. Originally joining Start Small Think Big as the Chief Financial Officer before moving into the Executive Director role three years later, Jo brings a unique blend of non-profit leadership, entrepreneurship experience, and finance expertise to the role.

Jo began her career at PricewaterhouseCoopers in London, rising to Director, Corporate Finance, leading mergers and acquisitions in the consumer goods, retail and leisure sectors. She also worked for and sat on the board of a social enterprise investment fund in the UK, Big Issue Invest. In 2010, Jo relocated from the UK to California and left PwC to run a small, event management business, working closely with non-profit clients to create fundraising events and producing festivals, sports and custom events across the USA and Europe.

Making a final move from California to New York in 2017, Jo joined Girls With Impact as their Chief Operating Officer, a non-profit offering entrepreneurship programs for high school girls, where she built a team to offer female identifying, 13-18 year olds across the USA a 12-week virtual academy.

Jo blends her passion for small business and entrepreneurship with a deep desire to address the systemic challenges that historically marginalized communities face on a daily basis. Jo also sits on the board of the Center for Safety and Change in Rockland County, NY, a non-profit organization that serves victims and survivors of domestic violence and gender-based crimes.

Jo can be contacted at Start Small Think Big via email jo@startsmallthinkbig.org.



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SPEAKER BIOS



CHELSEA MAXWELL, MSW
SR. RESEARCH ASSOCIATE /
ASSOCIATION FOR ENTERPRISE
OPPORTUNITY (AEO)

Chelsea Maxwell, MSW, Sr. Research Associate / Association for Enterprise Opportunity (AEO)

Chelsea Maxwell is a Senior Research Associate at the Association for Enterprise Opportunity in Washington, DC, where she focuses on advancing economic and social justice through impactful research and advocacy. Holding a Master of Social Work from the University of Pennsylvania School of Social Policy & Practice, Chelsea blends her education with a strong commitment to community development and supporting underserved communities.

Chelsea’s career is marked by a commitment to fostering healthy communities, particularly for underserved populations. She leverages her strong writing skills to articulate the challenges and opportunities faced by these communities and community-informed solutions, producing influential publications and research findings that guide policy and practice. Her contributions to research and publications reflect her commitment to addressing systemic inequalities through informed advocacy.

As an Assistant Adjunct Professor at Dordt University, Chelsea imparts invaluable knowledge to aspiring social workers in the Forbes-recognized graduate social work program. Through her classes and mentorship, she nurtures the emergence of a new wave of social change agents, emphasizing the significance of research, storytelling, and effective communication in community mobilization and policy advocacy.

Previously, Chelsea co-launched the Families Valued initiative at the Center for Public Justice, advocating for labor policies that support family health and well-being. Her multifaceted contributions encompassed crafting policy briefs and blog entries and delivering compelling testimony to shape legislation on family leave and unemployment benefits. Her previous public service experience also includes working for the Food Bank of Iowa, the City of Philadelphia’s Office of Homeless Services, and Chicago’s Howard Area Community Center.

As a sixth-generation Iowan now residing in the District of Columbia, Chelsea draws deeply from her roots to inform her public service and community empowerment work. Her ongoing research and advocacy endeavors remain steadfastly centered on upholding human dignity in both policy formulation and implementation, ultimately contributing to the flourishing of diverse and inclusive communities.



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SPEAKER BIOS



COLES JENNINGS
DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE
SUSTAINABILITY / COMMUNITY
CLIMATE COLLABORATIVE (C3)

Coles Jennings, Director of Corporate Sustainability / Community Climate Collaborative (C3)

Coles combines 15 years of engineering experience with a passion for sustainability, energy conservation, and affordability. One of his core beliefs is that the key to a sustainable future lies in decoupling pollution and production. Through his years of consulting for building design and performance, he has completed energy and sustainability assessments and designed system upgrades for commercial and government facilities all over the world. Coles is thrilled to put this experience to work helping organizations in the community reduce their resource footprints and realize better returns on their energy investments. Coles graduated from the University of Virginia with a BS in Mechanical Engineering. He is a Professional Engineer in the state of Virginia, an AEE Certified Energy Auditor, and a LEED Associated Professional. Born and raised in Roanoke, VA, his love of the Blue Ridge mountains has kept him in the state his whole life. Outside of work, you can find him outdoors with his wife and three children, playing and coaching soccer, or generally stumbling through amateur carpentry projects. He’s also a die-hard UVA basketball fan despite his own below-average jump shot.



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SPEAKER BIOS



SCOT CASE

VP, CSR & SUSTAINABILITY / NATIONAL
RETAIL FEDERATION (NRF)

Scot Case, VP, CSR & Sustainability / National Retail Federation (NRF)

Scot Case is vice president of corporate social responsibility and sustainability at the National Retail Federation, the world’s largest trade association for retailers. He leads NRF’s Sustainability Council and supports retailer efforts to use their businesses to make the world a better place for everyone.

Case has focused on the intersection of business, environmental and social concerns since the mid-1990s. With strategic leadership experience in the retail, quick-service restaurant, manufacturing and nonprofit sectors, he provides a system-wide perspective that helps NRF members thrive in a rapidly changing future.

Throughout Case’s career as a strategist, consultant and sustainability expert, he has worked with organizations including the White House, World Bank, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, large publicly-traded and private-sector companies, and federal, state and local governments around the world. Case was also a partner in a small business that he grew and sold, which provides him with a deep appreciation for the unique challenges faced by smaller and growing NRF members.

A frequent keynote speaker and conference presenter on strategy development, leadership and sustainability, Case has published dozens of articles and case studies, testified before Congress, and been quoted broadly in mainstream media.

Case is originally from Charlotte, N.C., and holds a master's degree in political science with a focus on sustainability from Virginia Tech.



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