

fourth annual CHICAGOLAND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT Symposium

October 23, 2025 at Malcolm X College

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BUILDING A RESILIENT WORKFORCE: THRIVING IN CHANGE AND UNCERTAINTY

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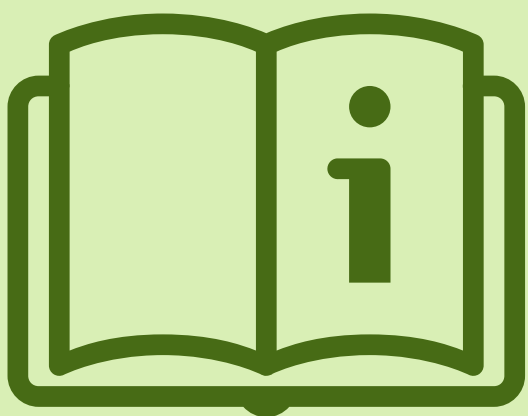
Important Info



Parking for this event is complimentary. You can validate your parking ticket as you enter or leave the Conference Center or at the security desk in the main lobby.

The wi-fi network is CCCFREE.

You must validate your email address or phone number to access the network. [Click here for detailed instructions or find a Symposium volunteer for assistance.](#)



A free networking directory and all presenters' materials are available to

you via the Symposium Hub at TheInnovationNexus.org/hub

Use #WkDevSymposium to share your experience on social media!



Schedule

Click any underlined item in the schedule to learn more.
Please note that the times listed are subject to change.

8:30	Networking & Registration
9:30	<u>Welcome and Opening Remarks</u> Combined rooms 1106, 1107, 1108
10:15	<u>Keynote Presentation</u> Combined rooms 1106, 1107, 1108
10:45	<i>Break</i>
11:00	<u>AM Breakout Sessions</u> Select from one of three sessions.
12:00	<i>Break</i>
12:15	<u>Lunch Plenary.</u> Combined rooms 1106, 1107, 1108
1:15	<i>Break</i>
1:30	<u>PM Breakout Sessions</u> Select from one of three sessions.
2:30	<i>Break</i>
2:45	<u>Closing Session and Remarks</u> Auditorium
3:45	Networking Reception Provided in Conference Center lobby until 6 PM

Opening Remarks

Hosted in combined rooms 1106, 1107, 1108.

Click any speaker's name to view their bio.

Speakers

Listed in order of appearance

Verónica Herrero, Executive Vice Chancellor at City Colleges of Chicago

Mayor Brandon Johnson, Mayor of the City of Chicago

Irene Sherr, Deputy Bureau Chief at Cook County Bureau of Economic Development

Matt Bruce, Executive Director at Chicagoland Workforce Funder Alliance

Keynote

Hiring Her Is System Change

Keynote presentation exploring resiliency as a trait, a strategy, and a call to action for workforce development and beyond via the challenges, experiences, and opportunities of justice-involved women. Attendees will walk away with an understanding of the layered and intersectional challenges faced by justice-involved women, and what they can do to support opportunities for justice-involved women to excel.

Presented by **Willette Benford**, Wisdom Works LLC and Senior Advisor at The Office of MK Pritzker



AM Breakouts

*Select one of three sessions to attend.
Click any speaker's name to view their bio.*

From Pilot to Impact: Innovative Program Models Supporting Worker Outcomes

Room 1106

Real talk on practical experiments that move workforce outcomes. Panelists share what worked, and what didn't—across stacked pathways, employer connection rituals, and social-enterprise partners.

Speakers

Dr. Kathleen St. Louis Caliento, President and CEO
at Cara Collective

Sarah Klebo, Director of Human Resources at
Fitness Formula Clubs Corporate

Andrea Messing-Mathie, Executive Director of
Undergraduate Innovation at National Louis
University

Moderated by **Adrian Esquivel**, Deputy Director at
Chicagoland Workforce Funder Alliance



Meeting the Moment in Workforce Development Advocacy

Room 1107

Presentation covering federal, state, and local policy changes, how they affect our work, and what we can do to respond.

Speakers

Trenity Dobbey, Director of Workforce

Development at City of Chicago Mayor's Office

Christina Warden, Vice President of Policy and Programs at Women Employed

Torrence Gardner, Policy Manager at The Chicago Community Trust

Megan Evans, Sr. Government Affairs Manager at National Skills Coalition

Moderated by **Chris Warland**, Director of Policy and Advocacy at Chicago Jobs Council



Using AI to Level the Playing Field in Hiring

Room 1108

A panel of HR, AI, and workforce experts will discuss the ways AI can be used to remove bias in hiring and how to carefully develop AI tools that help instead of hinder overlooked talent.

Speakers

Bridget Altenburg, CEO at Skills for Chicago

Jacquelyn Kress, Founder at P2R Advisory

Liz Eversoll, CEO at Career Highways

Stephanie Cardella, Executive Director of AI Education Network at LEAP Innovations



Lunch Plenary

*Hosted in combined rooms 1106, 1107, 1108.
Click any speaker's name to view their bio.*

Regulating Self and Others During Challenging Times

Interactive workshop designed to strengthen resilience, emotional regulation, and connection in the workplace and beyond. Using evidence-based frameworks, participants will explore how stress affects performance and decision-making. Together, we'll examine core methods for regulation to better engage ourselves and those around us.

By the end of this session, participants will leave with actionable insights and practices to better regulate themselves, support others, and foster environments where both well-being and performance can thrive.

Speakers

Joe Laipple, President and COO at Kintla

Ben Frank, Sr. Director of Wellness at NAMI Chicago



PM Breakouts

*Select one of three sessions to attend.
Click any speaker's name to view their bio.*

Family First: Leveraging Caregiver Insights to Strengthen Workforce Engagement and Retention

Room 1106

Learn how centering parent and caregiver feedback can help us create innovative models and actionable practices that improve participation, engagement, and long-term retention by centering the needs and lived experiences of families.

By the end of this session, participants will be able to identify core themes emerging from caregiver feedback that impact workforce participation; analyze strategies to meaningfully respond to caregivers' needs; apply family-informed, equity-centered practices to design or improve programs; and collaborate iwth peers to surface actionable responses to family-identified priorities.

Speakers

Vikki Rompala, VP of Family Hub at Chicago Commons

Sarah Spunt, Executive Director at LIFT-Chicago

Brian Kopinski, IE & WFD Manager at PODER



Flex, Don't Break: Mastering the Art of Adaptive Leadership

Room 1107

Workshop exploring how to practice adaptive leadership at all levels of organizational hierarchy to respond flexibly, collaboratively, and resiliently during times of change and uncertainty.

Speakers

Veronica Sek-Shubert, Business Services Manager at Sinai Urban Health Institute

Melissa Martin, Program Manager of Workforce Development at Sinai Urban Health Institute

Cross-Sector Partnership Development for Workforce Readiness and Career Pathways

Room 1108

Workshop exploring strategies for effective collaboration with workforce service agencies and local employers through the Illinois Postsecondary and Career Expectations (PaCE) framework.

Speakers

Olivia Sanchez, Training & Development Specialist at Illinois Student Assistance Commission

Manuel Talavera, Training & Development Specialist at Illinois Student Assistance Commission



Closing Session

Hosted in auditorium.

Click any speaker's name to view their bio.

Resilience in the Face of Economic Exclusion

Civic leaders share community, political, and academic insights around the economic experiences of Black people in the Chicago region. The discussion will be based around the ground-breaking reports released earlier this year: Breaking the Chains from Equity and Transformation (EAT) and Fathers, Families, and Healthy Communities (FFHC). Home, work, government, and community spaces can all be arenas for advancing justice and building resilience in and with Black communities. What can the workforce development community do to advance justice for Black workers in Chicago?

Daniel Ash, President at Field Foundation of Illinois
Khari Humphries, Deputy Mayor of Education and Youth at City of Chicago Mayor's Office
Matthew Harvey, Research Assistant and Storyteller at Equity and Transformation
Moderated by **Cory Muldoon**, Program Director of Quality Jobs at Inclusive Economy Lab at The University of Chicago

Closing Remarks

Offered by **George Wright**, CEO at The Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership



Presenter Bios

*Available presenter bios are listed alphabetically by last name.
There is only one bio per page.*

Bridget Altenburg

Like many of our job seekers, Bridget Altenburg has an eclectic career. She served in the Army, worked in the corporate sector, and spent the last 15 years running workforce non-profits.

As the CEO of Skills for Chicago, she helps bridge the gap between community organizations, candidates, and employers. Using strong employer relationships, technology and data, Skills for Chicago helps almost 1 in 3 of submitted candidates land a job.

The Skills AI-driven Career Highways platform helps candidates and career coaches plan their now job, next job, and dream job while helping employers shift to a skills based hiring process.

Bridget holds an MBA from Columbia Business School in New York and a BS in Russian and French from the United States Military Academy at West Point, proving that sometimes there's a big gap between what you study in college and what you do in your day job!



Daniel Ash

Daniel O. Ash is president of the Field Foundation, a private and independent foundation that supports community power building in Chicago through strategic investments in civic infrastructure, the cultural sector, local news outlets, and organizers. Through its grantmaking, the Field Foundation collaborates with funding partners to distribute more than \$11 million annually to nonprofit organizations and leaders, focusing primarily on the city's South and West Sides.

Prior to his current role, Daniel was associate vice president of Community Impact for The Chicago Community Trust, and he previously served as the Trust's chief marketing officer. Before that, Daniel spent ten years as vice president of Chicago Public Media.

Daniel earned his M.P.P. from the Harris School of Public Policy at the University of Chicago and a B.A. in Economics from Oberlin College. He completed a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship at Princeton University. Daniel was selected as a Leadership Greater Chicago Daniel Burnham Fellow in 2023. He was recognized as a Crain's Chicago Notable Leader in Philanthropy in 2025.



Willette Benford

Willette Benford is an ordained minister, wife, mother, criminal legal system advocate, and a survivor of the criminal legal system. Mrs. Benford currently serves as senior advisor to the First Lady of Illinois MK Pritzker. Her role as senior advisor to MK Pritzker allows her to build and expand relationships across various government sectors, state and city departments, philanthropic agencies and community partnerships to improve the lives of returning residents statewide.

Prior to this role Mrs. Benford served as the first Director of Re-Entry in the Mayor's Office in the city of Chicago. While serving in this role Mrs. Benford launched the S.P.R.I.N.G. Forward pilot providing workforce training and housing for 400 returning residents. Mrs. Benford was also responsible for the passage of one the most progressive Fair Chance Hiring ordinances in the United States.

She serves in a leadership role in Governor Pritzker's Justice Cabinet, which focuses on a continuum that prevents, reduces and supports those impacted by incarceration with a focus on housing, health care, and workforce development.

She has been recognized as a leader in the criminal justice community, serves on many boards, has received numerous awards and received national recognition for her contributions to re-entry and justice advocacy.

She resides on the south side of Chicago.



Matt Bruce

Matthew Bruce became the first Executive Director of the Chicagoland Workforce Funder Alliance (CWFA) in 2012.

CWFA is the Chicago region's major convener of the philanthropic community interested in workforce development, and an affiliate of the National Fund for Workforce Solutions. CWFA has fostered the collaboration of over 30 funders, pooled and invested over \$25 million, and supported over 20 workforce systems-change initiatives designed to reduce racial disparities in employment and earnings.

Prior to starting CWFA, Matt led workforce initiatives for the City of Boston. Matt has a Masters in Public Policy from the University of Chicago, and lives with his wife and 2 children in Oak Park, Illinois.



Dr Kathleen St. Louis Caliento

Dr. Kathleen St. Louis Caliento has spent nearly three decades focused on issues of social justice, including educational equity, workforce development, and economic empowerment. She currently serves as President & CEO of Cara Collective, a social impact enterprise dedicated to transforming the lives of individuals affected by poverty and promoting a more inclusive economy. Cara Collective produces more than 1,000 jobs annually, surpassing national retention norms by nearly 20 points.

Prior to her role at Cara Collective, Dr. Caliento served as the Chief Learning and Design Officer at the Academy Group. She helped students land coveted mentorship and internship opportunities throughout Chicago. Her impact extends to her time at Spark Program, where she held multiple leadership roles and led a 3x increase in revenue, corporate investment, and workplace apprenticeships.

Dr. Caliento is deeply committed to civic leadership and community engagement. She is the Vice Chair of the Adler University Board of Trustees and on the Leadership Greater Chicago LFA Board. She is also a Fellow of the 2020 class of Leadership Greater Chicago, a member of the Economic Club of Chicago, and a graduate of the University of Chicago's Civic Leadership Academy.

A published author, Dr. Caliento earned her Master of Arts and her Doctor of Philosophy in Secondary Science Education from Columbia University and her Master of Business Administration from Geis College of Business at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.



Stephanie Cardella

Stephanie Cardella drives organizational improvement and change management through systems approach, human-centered design, and innovation.

As the Executive Director of Learning & Innovation for LEAP Innovations, she creates conditions for student success by supporting teachers, leaders, and schools in revolutionizing learning experiences.

With over two decades in education leadership including district and network leadership, she spearheaded PK-12 curriculum redesign, innovation and personalized learning, MTSS, and ensuring equity and access to rigorous learning across Pk - 12 urban, charter, suburban, and dual language districts.

Stephanie's approach is grounded in a deep understanding of the why and strong culture for learners and adults alike. She understands that the key to student success begins with engaging and student-led opportunities that leverage the individual and collective needs, voices, and identities of the learner, school, and community.

Her Bachelor's in Elementary Education and Master's in Language & Literacy and Educational Leadership provide a robust foundation in learning science and instructional best practices.



Trenity Dobbey

Trenity K. Dobbey brings more than a decade of leadership in human and social services, workforce development, reentry services, and strategic advocacy.

In her previous role with the Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS), Trenity led citywide initiatives to dismantle systemic barriers to employment for justice-impacted individuals, youth, and underserved populations. She advanced workforce readiness programs, forged and sustained community partnerships, and ensured that services aligned with broader city priorities. Her work included close collaboration with the Chicago Police Department (CPD), Cook County State's Attorney's Office (CCSAO), Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), and other partners to address abuse while connecting residents to preventive and restorative supports.

A proven leader in cross-sector collaboration, Trenity has built and managed multidisciplinary teams that deliver people-centered results. Her career has consistently focused on breaking down barriers, fostering alignment across systems, and creating inclusive ecosystems that expand equitable access to opportunity.

Today, as Director of Workforce Development in the Mayor's Office of Health & Human Services, Trenity is spearheading efforts to align workforce strategies citywide. Her work centers on advancing equity, strengthening partnerships, and supporting initiatives that create sustainable pathways for residents while driving long-term, systemic change.

Trenity holds a Master of Science in Criminal Justice and a Bachelor's in Behavioral and Social Sciences.



Adrian Esquivel

Adrian Esquivel serves as the deputy director for the Chicagoland Workforce Funder Alliance. In this role, working with a wide variety of stakeholders, Adrian oversees industry-sector partnerships, organizes for workers' rights, and promotes educational and public policy alignment to increase equity in the region.

Before joining the Funder Alliance, Adrian worked on community and economic development issues at Enlace Chicago. He also advised World Business Chicago—the City of Chicago's economic development agency—on its workforce development strategy in an effort to align the work of economic and workforce development. Adrian has served as a board member of the Woodstock Institute, as a member of the City of Chicago's Community Development Advisory Council, and on the State of Illinois' Equity Task Force. He presents nationally at conferences on issues of workforce development equity.

Adrian holds a bachelor's degree in social science from the University of Michigan and a master's degree in urban planning and policy from the University of Illinois at Chicago. He was a Civic Leadership Academy Fellow at the Harris School of Public Policy at the University of Chicago.



Megan Evans

As Senior Government Affairs Manager, Megan works closely with members of Congress and their staff as well as the Administration to advocate on behalf of National Skills Coalition's legislative agenda. She provides in-depth policy analysis of legislation and works to set advocacy strategy to move the needle on NSC's priorities.

Before Joining NSC in 2021, Megan served as a lobbyist for the Association of Equipment Manufacturers working on a portfolio including trade, infrastructure, and workforce development. She also spent several years performing legislative analysis research on a variety of federal issues in the Legislative Department for the International Brotherhood of Teamsters.

Prior to that role, Megan served as a Staff Assistant for the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, where she performed legislative research and provided administrative support to Committee Democrats.



Liz Eversoll

Liz Eversoll is the Founder and CEO of Career Highways. She spent over 30 years in the IT/Software industry and has extensive experience as an entrepreneur, business owner, IT executive, technology services and reseller executive, and consultant. She is a serial entrepreneur with a passion for building businesses with strong vision and disruptive potential and has had successful exits.

Liz was VP Software Sales & Service at CDW running a multi-billion dollar business where her business won multiple international awards from Microsoft and other channel partners. Liz has also held management positions in all areas of IT/Software at large companies such as Dupont and TDS.

She is a computer science major with extensive experience in software product development and management.



Ben Frank

Ben Frank joined the NAMI Chicago team in August 2018 where he currently holds the role of Senior Director of Wellness in September 2020. He previously served as Education Coordinator, and Clinical Coordinator of the Helpline program.

Ben oversees wellness strategy ensuring that the organization builds an internal culture that promotes wellness at NAMI Chicago in a way that is consistent with the how we teach and support wellness in the community.



Torrence Gardner

Torrence Gardner is the manager of policy change at The Chicago Community Trust. With a background in urban planning, he served as zoning & development director for a Chicago alderman. His most recent efforts include seeking to prevent homeowners from losing all their home equity over minor tax debts during a property tax sale.

Torrence's accomplishments include drafting the Chicago Juneteenth Holiday ordinance, which made Chicago one of the first major cities to make Juneteenth a paid holiday ahead of the federal government.

As former chief of staff to Illinois State Rep. Cassidy, he was instrumental in passing crucial legislation for vulnerable communities that has made Illinois a safe haven for a diverse set of vulnerable groups. He has a wealth of experience in crafting and passing legislation at multiple levels of government.



Matthew Harvey

Matthew Harvey is a father, media literacy educator, and award-winning writer born-and-raised in Chicago’s Uptown neighborhood.

His career is dedicated to empowering communities through access to information, and connecting people through storytelling. He spent nearly a decade as a reporter for Chicago-based media outlets. Now he’s applying his communication, media strategies, and reporting skills to Research and Communications at EAT.



Verónica Herrero

Verónica Herrero is the Executive Vice Chancellor – Chief Institutional Advancement Officer and Chief of Staff at City Colleges of Chicago. She also serves as President of the City Colleges of Chicago Foundation.

Executive Vice Chancellor Herrero has nearly 20 years of experience in leading data-driven strategies and forging transformative partnerships that advance student success. In her multifaceted role, she provides districtwide leadership and oversight for strategy, institutional effectiveness, external affairs, fundraising, and marketing and communications—areas that are essential in shaping the direction and impact of one of the largest community college systems in the United States.

Herrero is a champion of collaborative leadership and building strategic partnerships with local, regional, and national stakeholders across sectors. In collaboration with the Chancellor, she has re-energized public and private fundraising efforts for the City Colleges of Chicago and CCC Foundation to secure historic investments in holistic student supports and program innovation.

Herrero joined City Colleges in 2019 as the Chief of Staff and Strategy to architect the system’s five-year strategic framework, emerging as a driving force behind districtwide transformation. She has cross-sector experience in education, strategy, and student success, with prior roles at One Million Degrees, the University of Chicago Urban Education Institute, and Chicago Public Schools.

In addition to her leadership at City Colleges, Herrero serves as Vice Chair of the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) and as Chair of the Research and Innovation, Legal and Legislative Affairs Committee on the Northern Illinois University Board of Trustees. She earned a bachelor’s degree from the University of Wisconsin – Madison and an MBA from the University of Chicago Booth School of Business.

A Chicago native, Herrero is the proud daughter of two Mexican immigrants and mother of two young boys. Her life and career have been driven by a clear mission: to build equitable systems that empower people from every background, including first-generation students and communities of color, to thrive.



Khari Humphries

Khari Humphries is Chicago's Deputy Mayor for Education and Youth. With more than 25 years of leadership in youth development, community building, and nonprofit work, he has shaped programs that connect thousands of young people and families to opportunity.

Khari has held leadership roles with Thrive Chicago, The Community Builders, and the Boys and Girls Club, and previously served as Chicago's First Deputy Director of Education and Youth.

A Civic Leadership Academy Fellow and longtime Bronzeville resident, Khari is also a certified trainer, racial healing practitioner, and proud CPS parent.



Sarah Klebo

Originally from Texas and now based in Chicago, I'm an HR leader with a Master's degree in Behavioral Science with a focus in Industrial/Organizational Psychology and a SHRM-CP certification.

My career has been rooted in the hospitality industry, where I've led people-first initiatives to strengthen culture, boost engagement, and support high-performing frontline teams.

Before transitioning fully into HR, I worked in the legal field handling civil mediations in Texas courtrooms - a role that sharpened my ability to navigate complex interpersonal dynamics and facilitate thoughtful, solution-driven dialogue.

I'm especially passionate about challenging others to shift their thought patterns so they can unlock smarter decisions. I bring a strategic, people-centric mindset to every space I'm in, grounded in both empathy and results.

Outside of work, you'll find me traveling with my fiancé, hitting a CrossFit workout, getting lost in a good book, or sipping on an extra-strong cup of coffee.



Brian Kopinski

Brian Kopinski is currently a Program Manager at PODER & Oprima-1 LLC. Brian Kopinski brings experience from previous roles at PODER & Oprima-1 LLC and Stafford House International.

He holds a Bachelors degree in English and has a Certificate in Teaching English to Teachers of Other Languages (CELTA) and has been working in the Adult Education field for the last 13 years



Jacquelyn Kress

Jacquelyn Kress built her career in high-stakes environments, first as a professional opera singer and now as a Chief People Officer and founder of P2R Advisory. On stage, there are no second takes. You show up prepared, read the room, and deliver. That same performance mindset defines her approach to business.

At P2R, Jacquelyn partners with growing companies to fix what slows them down by building people systems, leadership capability, and cultural clarity that accelerate growth. She translates employee sentiment into insights that drive business goals, and business goals into language teams can rally around.

From scrappy startups to companies at \$100M+ EBITDA, Jacquelyn has a proven track record of helping leaders align people and performance to achieve results.



Joe Laipple

Joe is President-COO at Kintla focused on helping leaders get traction with personal and organizational change. He is a cognitive-behavioral psychologist specializing in getting change to stick with 20 years of experience designing, implementing and facilitating major change initiatives across 250 plus organizations internationally.

Joe is an author of three books including the book Rapid Change: Immediate Action for the Impatient Leader.



Melissa Martin

Melissa Martin is a Program Manager of Workforce Development at the Sinai Urban Health Institute where she leads the ongoing implementation and innovation of the Population Health Career Pathways program.

Melissa brings over 15 years of public health experience with a focus on strengthening and developing its workforce. She has trained and mentored public health professionals, helping them build the skills and capacity necessary to serve their communities effectively.

Through her expertise in program development and strategic planning, Melissa helps organizations create lasting change. She partners with agencies to improve their operations, from financial planning to grant management, always focusing on data-driven approaches that work. Bringing different sectors together – public health, healthcare, education, and social services – to build programs that serve diverse communities and create lasting impact drives her work.

Melissa has a Bachelor of Arts and a Master of Public Health from the University of Illinois at Chicago.



Andrea Messing-Mathie

I'm a K-16 education innovator and advocate dedicated to building a more inclusive and connected system of learning and work.

Throughout my career, I've helped design policies, programs, and partnerships that expand access to opportunity — from youth apprenticeship to college and career pathways.

As Executive Director for Undergraduate Innovation and Learn & Earn in 3 (LE3) at National Louis University, I'm leading efforts to reimagine undergraduate education so students can earn a degree and build their careers at the same time. By integrating a student's full time work into their classroom experience, we're expanding what it means to prepare for the future. We're designing a future where students don't have to choose between college, work, and family.

I believe in the power of social entrepreneurship, collaboration, and equity-centered design to create lasting change — and in the potential of every learner to thrive when systems meet them where they are. When I'm not working (or thinking about work), I am on a bicycle, teaching yoga, or traveling with my family.



Cory Muldoon

Cory Muldoon creates pathways to good jobs. He's the Quality Jobs Program Director at the Inclusive Economy Lab, where he leads efforts to improve career access and job quality for Chicago workers. His current research interests include work on apprenticeships, access to the skilled trades, state funded workforce programs, and fair chance hiring.

Previously, Cory served in leadership roles with Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership, Public Allies, and One Northside. Across those organizations and others he launched youth workforce programs, expanded opportunities for returning residents, shaped state policy, and helped direct tens of millions of dollars into Chicago communities.

Cory is a Leadership Greater Chicago Fellow, a Climate Base Fellow, and lives with his family in Bronzeville.



Vikki Rompala

Vikki Rompala, LCSW, PhD (ABD) joined Chicago Commons in 2020 with over 20 years of experience with community organizations providing culturally and linguistically relevant social services, health education, assessment, treatment services, and program development.

Before joining Commons, Vikki was a researcher at Rush University Medical Center; led the Quality and Outcomes Department at Metropolitan Family Services, and was a program evaluator for La Rabida Children's Hospital.

Vikki's accomplishments include her work as co-chair of the Partnering with Youth and Families Committee for the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, where she partnered with families and youth to elevate their voices for change at the organizational, local, state, and federal levels.

She is also a Peer Reviewer for the Council of Accreditation and provides training on family systems, continuous quality improvement, and trauma-informed education and interventions.

Vikki earned a master's degree in social work focusing on Clinical and Community Organizing from the University of Maryland. Her PhD training from the University of Illinois Chicago focused on program evaluation and public policy. Vikki's dissertation research is on building workforce opportunities that grow skills and social capital among youth.



Olivia Sánchez

Training & Development Specialist

Education: B.S. in Business Management National-Louis University and M.A. in Leadership in Higher Education in the Engaging Latinx Communities for Education (ENLACE) program at Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU).

Olivia is a first-generation college student with a Bachelor of Science in Business Management from National-Louis University and is pursuing a Master of Arts in Leadership in Higher Education through the ENLACE program at Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU).

She began her journey with ISAC in December 2019 as a Parent Outreach Coordinator and has since moved to the Training and Development team.

Olivia has a diverse professional background, with experience in nonprofit, healthcare, and workforce development sectors, focusing on predominantly monolingual Spanish speaking communities in the Chicago area and collar counties.

Originally from Mexico and raised in Little Village, Chicago. In her free time, Olivia enjoys spending time with her kids, reading, and playing with her two rescue dogs, Riley and Lola.



Veronica Sek-Shubert

Veronica Sek-Shubert is a Business Services Manager at the Sinai Urban Health Institute (SUHI) where she oversees a wide range of business and workforce development initiatives including their internship and apprenticeship program. She collaborates with employers to identify job opportunities, internships, and on-the-job training prospects for program participants.

Prior to SUHI, Veronica was Senior Director of the Community Health Worker certificate and apprenticeship program at City Colleges of Chicago – Malcolm X College, where she played a pivotal role in increasing enrollment and improving faculty engagement.

Veronica deeply believes in the importance of socio-economic stability, asserting that everyone deserves the opportunity to live their healthiest and most fulfilled life.

Bachelor of Arts and a Master of Public Health from the University of Illinois at Chicago and is currently completing a Doctor of Public Health degree at Tulane University.



Irene Sherr

Irene Sherr is Deputy Bureau Chief at the Cook County Bureau of Economic Development, where she has spent over a decade designing and scaling programs that advance equitable economic growth across the Chicago region. She currently oversees nearly \$100 million in programs spanning small business support, sector strategies (including manufacturing, clean energy and the arts), workforce development and regional economic development.

A collaborative leader and public sector "intrapreneur," Irene is known for translating strategy into action, securing new resources, and building high-impact programs and partnerships. She brings a strong track record in stakeholder engagement, program design, and cross-sector collaboration, and is recognized for her creative problem solving and community-cantered approach.

An award-winning public servant, she is deeply committed to building inclusive, resilient communities throughout Cook County.



Sarah Spunt

Sarah Spunt is a licensed clinical social worker and the Executive Director at LIFT-Chicago, a national nonprofit that empowers families to break the cycle of poverty. At LIFT, she is responsible for cultivating new key partnerships; building and sustaining relationships with new and existing donors and supporters; and leading the development of LIFT-Chicago's strategic plan in concert with the Program Staff and the LIFT-Chicago Regional Advisory Board. Sarah is currently the Family Economic Mobility Partner Project Director for the National Center for Parent, Family, and Community Engagement and a member Behavior and Trauma Informed Care Workgroup within the Office of Head Start National Centers for Training and Technical Assistance. Additionally, Sarah is the Co-Chair for the IL Cash Coalition.

Prior to being the Executive Director, Sarah was LIFT-Chicago's program lead. In this role, she designed LIFT's two-generational program model in Chicago. Sarah works closely with LIFT's National Program Team to create a program and evaluation framework to track progress against regional and national goals, targets, and milestones.

Sarah has over 15 years of experience working in the public sector. She holds a professional educator license – school social worker endorsement and a certification in yoga-informed psychotherapy. Sarah served on Star Early's Policy Council for three years as a community representative and volunteers her time with a Between Friends, a Chicago non-profit focused on breaking the cycle of violence in families and communities.

Prior to LIFT, Sarah worked for Hanover Township Youth and Family Services in Bartlett, Illinois as a clinical interventionist. Additionally, Sarah was an AmeriCorps*VISTA with the International Book Project, a Lexington, Kentucky nonprofit that promotes literacy, education and global friendships by sending books throughout the developing world.

Sarah holds a master's degree in social work from Loyola University Chicago and a bachelor's in secondary social studies education from the University of Kentucky. In her free time, Sarah enjoys spending time with her family and is often training for a triathlon, or planning her next travel adventure.



Manuel Talavera

Training & Development Specialist

Education: B.A. in International Relations from Roosevelt University and Master of Public Administration (MPA) from University of Illinois Springfield

Manuel was born and raised in the southwest side of Chicago to immigrant parents from Mexico. Manuel, a first-generation college student, graduated from Roosevelt University with a B.A. in International Relations and holds a MPA from the University of Illinois Springfield.

Manuel has been working for the Illinois Student Assistance Commission for over five years. Prior to joining the Professional Development team, Manuel was a GEAR UP Specialist where he oversaw the implementation of 6th – 8th grade college access programming in middle schools throughout Illinois.

Manuel is a father of two and enjoys walking, biking, and volunteering.



Christina Warden

Christina Warden, Vice President of Policy and Programs, leads Women Employed's policy work on racial equity in high education and education & training career pathways.

She has worked in partnership with City Colleges of Chicago to establish sector-based career pathways policies and programs to serve adults with academic barriers to employment and to develop tools that are available for open use in the field, including bridge/IET programs and Career Foundations.

Christina is the Illinois state lead for the Lumina Foundation's FutureReady States initiative to increase barrier reduction funding for students in high-quality credential programs.



Chris Warland

Chris Warland is Director of Policy and Advocacy at Chicago Jobs Council, where he works to advance policy and systems change to ensure that quality employment is accessible to everyone.

Chris has over 20 years of experience in workforce development as a consultant, trainer, advocate, grantmaker, and thought leader focused on helping people and communities who have been excluded from economic opportunity access family sustaining jobs.

Chris has worked with communities across the country to help design, implement, and improve initiatives that support the employment goals of people facing barriers to work. His areas of expertise include transitional and subsidized employment, employment interventions for people experiencing homelessness, people returning to communities from incarceration, and opportunity youth; systems coordination among workforce, corrections, and homeless service systems; and integrating employment services with community violence interventions.



George Wright

George Wright became the CEO of The Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership (The Partnership) in June 2023, after stepping down from The Partnership Board and retiring as director of community relations for Citibank's Global Consumer Group. As director of community relations, Wright led all aspects of Citi's community development portfolio in Illinois and across the Central Region. Wright came to the CEO role after a distinguished career in banking and community investment and after serving as the co-chair of The Partnership's Board of Directors since 2015. Previously, Wright served as national director of emerging markets for Washington Mutual, where he was responsible for national home loan sales and operations to emerging market consumers and oversaw a team of more than 200 employees. Earlier in his career, Wright was a senior vice president at GMAC Bank where he was one of the six senior founding bank managers and was responsible for all areas of the bank's Community Reinvestment Act initiatives, as well as customer service and philanthropy. He began his career at Citicorp / Citibank in Illinois as a management associate and was progressively promoted throughout his 30 years there, ultimately rising to become community investment officer where he managed all aspects of community development for the Central Region and national manager of planning and integration.

In addition to his service on The Partnership Board, Wright has also served as Board Chair of Accion Chicago and the Center for Economic Progress, as well as the Greater Englewood CDC. In addition, he is the recipient of numerous community leadership awards including the James Sills Community Reinvestment Act Leadership Award, the YMCA Black / Hispanic Achiever in Industry Award, Englewood "Maker of Men" Award, 100 Black Men Leadership Award, Chicago Defender "Man of Excellence" Award, Executive of the Year for AFP and Chicago "Community Change Maker" Award.

Wright received his BS degree in Psychology from St. Joseph's College and did his graduate studies at Illinois Institute of Technology.



Thank you to the partner organizations and volunteers who came together to plan the 2025 Symposium



Special thank you to our sponsors



HOW TO ACCESS CCCWIFI NETWORK

Courtesy of City Colleges of Chicago

On the day of the event, on your device, go to your Wi-Fi settings and choose to connect to the “CCCWIFI” network. It will open up a webpage that will prompt you to register as a guest. Then, follow steps 1-5 for registration.

STEP 1: Register for guest access.



Welcome

Sign on for access.

Username:

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Password:

Sign On

[Or register for guest access](#)

STEP 2: Fill out registration form.



Registration

Please complete this registration form:

First name*

Last name*

Email address*

Mobile number

 +1 ▼

SMS provider*

ATT 

Register

Cancel

STEP 3: check your email for login information

An email or an SMS message has been sent to you containing your sign on credentials.

Username:

Password:

Sign On

[Or register for guest access](#)



STEP 5: Scroll through the Policy & Accept the terms to be connected.

STEP 4: Log back in using the account details (username & password) CCC has provided via email. The email should come from Guest-Notify@ccc.edu.

Acceptable Use Policy

Please read the Acceptable Use Policy

City Colleges of Chicago

Responsible Computer Use Policy

(adopted by the Board of Trustees on August 3, 2006)

I. INTRODUCTION

All users shall abide by the following provisions contained herein, or otherwise may be subject to disciplinary action or referral to the appropriate legal authorities for failing to comply.

II. SCOPE OF POLICY

This policy is applicable to all users of CCC information resources. This policy refers to all CCC "information resources" which means all computer and communications equipment installed on CCC property or otherwise furnished by CCC, whether individually controlled or shared, stand-alone or networked, and whether owned, leased, operated, or controlled by CCC, and including networking devices,

Accept

Decline

