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AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

**ACADEMY FELLOWS**

Winter/Spring 2020



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## **John Benigno AM'99**

Lieutenant, Chicago Police Department, Education and Training Division

As Commanding Officer of the Chicago Police Department's Instructional Design and Quality Control section, John oversees the creation and review of all curricula, training materials, eLearning, and training records for the second largest police department in the United States. Prior to his current rank, John served as a sergeant, detective, evidence technician, and police officer.

John holds a Doctor of Education degree in Curriculum and Instruction from Loyola University Chicago. He also holds an MA in Art History from the University of Chicago and a BA in Art History from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.



## **Jessica Biggs**

Organizer and Director, Southwest System of Care, The Southwest Organizing Project

Jessica leads the Southwest Organizing Project in developing and implementing the Southwest System of Care, bringing healthcare, behavioral health, and social service organizations together with neighborhood schools in an integrated service-delivery model that increases access and coordination of care. Prior to her work as an organizer, Jessica served as principal of Burke Elementary School in the Washington Park neighborhood, where she partnered with the community to move the school from probationary status to Good Standing.

Jessica holds a BA in Philosophy and a BS in Psychology from Loyola University Chicago and an MEd in School Leadership from Harvard University.



## **Judith Camacho-Campbell**

Director of Strategic Initiatives, Chicago Public Schools

A Chicago native and proud product of CPS, Judith has over ten years of experience working in high-need communities as an advocate for parents and students. In her current role, she leads the implementation of district-wide initiatives and engagement strategies for a variety of stakeholders. Prior to joining CPS, Judith was the Director of Corporate and Foundation Relations for Cristo Rey Jesuit High School, where she gained experience in grant writing, event planning, and board development. Her family instilled a deep passion for service that led her to join the board of Architresures, an arts-based community development organization. She volunteers as a mentor for high school students and is committed to narrowing the opportunity gap for Chicago's youth that are most in need.

Judith holds a BA in Political Science from Boston University and an MSW, Concentration in Schools and Nonprofit Management from Loyola University Chicago.



## **Ricardo Cifuentes**

Vice President of External Affairs, Esperanza Health Centers

With nearly eighteen years of development and marketing experience in the nonprofit sector, Ricardo joined Esperanza Health Centers in 2016, having previously served as Director of Development and Communications at Renaissance Social Services, Inc., and as Deputy Director at AIDS Legal Council of Chicago.

Ricardo obtained his BA in Political Science from the University of Illinois at Chicago and worked in political fundraising with candidates and elected officials from Illinois and around the country before moving into nonprofit development and communications in 2002.



## **Jahmal Cole**

Founder and CEO, Role Model Movement (My Block My Hood My City)

Jahmal founded My Block, My Hood, My City in 2014. The nonprofit takes teenagers from low-income neighborhoods on field trips throughout the city and provides technical training and laptops to support neighborhood block clubs. It also has organized an army of volunteers to decorate Martin Luther King Drive with Christmas lights and to clear snow from the homes of the elderly in Chatham.

Jahmal holds a BA in Communications from Wayne State College and an MS in Internet Marketing from Full Sail University.



## Dean Constantinou

Manager of Financial Planning and Analysis, Cook County Government, Bureau of Finance

Dean has nearly ten years of experience within the finance and budgeting departments of various public-facing organizations in the Chicagoland area. In his current role as the Manager of Financial Planning and Analysis, Dean is responsible for the short- and long-term forecasting of Cook County's \$6.2 billion in revenues and expenses and supports the analytical needs of the Chief Financial Officer within the County's Bureau of Finance.

A native to the region, Dean has a BS in Political Science and an MPA with a concentration in Financial Management from the University of Illinois at Chicago.



## Danni T. Cosey Gay

Communications Director, Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership (The Partnership)

Danni began her career with the City of Chicago's Department of Planning and Development, educating residents about vital housing, economic, and policy resources through planning and hosting events such as the Rent's Rights, Historic Bungalow, and Chicago Arts and Resource expos. Currently working as Communications Director for the Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership, Danni leads a team in developing strategies that help advance The Partnership's efforts to provide employment training and placement services for employers and job seekers. Danni is widely known for her ability to cultivate relationships, develop strategic practices, find creative and innovative solutions, and evolve individual and organizational brands.

Danni holds a BAS in Public Policy - Political Science from Chicago State University and an MA from Columbia College Chicago.



## Barbara Engelskirchen

Chief Development Officer, National Museum of Mexican Art

As Chief Development Officer, Barbara oversees fundraising and communications efforts for the National Museum of Mexican Art. She brings to the Museum a breadth of experience in marketing, communications, fundraising, and education, built from her experience working for both corporations and nonprofit organizations. Barbara is proud to have served as a 5th grade teacher in a Chicago Public Schools bilingual classroom, completed the Getty Leadership Institute for museum professionals, and been selected to serve as a trustee for Enrich Chicago.

Barbara earned a BA in Education from Purdue University and an MBA from the University of Michigan.



## Rebecca Estrada

Senior Director of Operations, Youth Division for the City of Chicago Department of Family Support Services

Prior to joining the Chicago Department of Family Support Services, Rebecca served in the nonprofit sector encompassing more than twenty years of progressive responsibility in programs and administration. She first began her career as a domestic violence counselor at Cook County Hospital and has since committed to focus her work on empowering individuals and communities.

Rebecca holds a BA in Psychology with a minor in Women's Studies from Loyola University Chicago and an MBA from National Louis University.



## Stephanie Gomez

Program Manager Economic Vitality, West Side United - Rush University Medical Center

Stephanie is a first-generation Latina from the Northside of Chicago. Her parents' migration from Colombia fuels her passion for creating equitable and attainable economic opportunities for communities of color. As the Economic Vitality Program Manager at West Side United, Stephanie collaborates with healthcare institutions to develop and implement Employee Professional Pathways for incumbent workers and manages local hiring initiatives with the goal of hiring 3,500 West Side residents by 2021.

Stephanie has a BA in Sociology from Northeastern Illinois University with a minor in Latinx Studies and an MA in Latin American Studies from the University of Florida.



## **Marshall E. Hatch Jr., AM'17**

Co-Founder and Executive Director, MAAFA Redemption Project

Marshall is the Co-Founder and Executive Director of the MAAFA Redemption Project, a faith-based residential institute for Black and Brown young men who are furthest from opportunity. The Project provides them with housing, job skills development, educational opportunities, and wrap-around social services. These supports are supplemented with programming that focuses on the arts, cultural-identity development, spiritual enrichment, transformative travel, civic empowerment, and insistent life coaching/mentoring.

Marshall holds a BA in Political Science from Bates College and MDiv and AM degrees from the University of Chicago.



## **Skyla S. Hearn**

Chief Archivist and Special Collections Librarian,  
DuSable Museum of African American History

Skyla is the Chief Archivist and Special Collections Librarian at the DuSable Museum of African American History. As an activist archivist, Skyla champions for the documentation and preservation of the unsung, lesser-known contributors from Black/African American communities and other groups not of the hegemony. She works with community members, artists, and scholars; and cultural heritage, arts, and education organizations throughout and beyond Chicago.

Skyla received an MSLIS with a Special Collections certificate from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and a BA in Mass Communications and Media Arts, Photography, and Black American Studies from Southern Illinois University-Carbondale.



## **Tim Jeffries**

Deputy Commissioner, Department of Planning and Development

Tim is a Deputy Commissioner in the City of Chicago's Department of Planning and Development where he manages the City's financial incentives programs, including Tax Increment Financing (TIF) and property tax abatements. Previous experience includes positions at the Active Transportation Alliance and Friends of the Parks. Tim has also served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Romania.

Tim has a BA in History and Education from Creighton University, an MA in Urban Planning and Policy from the University of Illinois at Chicago, and is a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP).



## **Brittany Jackson Kairis**

District Director, Decision Support, City Colleges of Chicago - District Office

Brittany serves as the Executive Director of Adult Education at City Colleges of Chicago (CCC), providing leadership to improve operational efficiency, instructional quality, and student transitions to employment or college credit. Prior to joining CCC, Brittany was a middle school math, science, and reading teacher on the West and South Sides of Chicago.

Brittany holds an MEd from Northwestern University and a BA from Marian University-Indianapolis.



## **Era Laudermilk**

Deputy Public Defender of Policy & Strategic Planning,  
Law Office of the Cook County Public Defender

Era is the Deputy of Policy and Strategic Planning at the Cook County Defender's Office, which protects the fundamental rights, liberties, and dignity of each person whose case has been entrusted to the Law Office of Cook County by providing the finest legal representation. Era has served in numerous leadership roles in criminal justice / juvenile justice reform at the state and local levels, implementing policies that enhance positive outcomes for justice-involved people.

Era received a BA in Political Science from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, and a JD from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign College of Law.



## **Viviana Martinez**

Special Assistant for Legal Affairs, Cook County

Viviana is the lead attorney in Cook County's Bureau of Administration, which includes the Departments of Adoption and Family Supportive Services; Animal and Rabies Control; Emergency Management; Environment and Sustainability; Transportation and Highways; Research Operations and Innovation; and the Office of the Medical Examiner. Her areas of expertise include policy and legislation. She serves as an advisor for Cook County's Policy Roadmap, which establishes the strategic vision of the County, and chairs the County's Policy Review Committee. Viviana has helped make Cook County a standard bearer for immigrant fairness and integration, and taken steps to ensure that residents are treated equally under the law. She has also collaborated with municipalities nationwide on litigation and other efforts to protect human rights and maintain federal funding for essential government services.

Viviana holds a BA in English Literature and Gender Studies from Northwestern University, and a JD from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.



## **Timothy O'Connell**

Deputy Chief Program Officer, Chicago Park District

Timothy is the Deputy Chief Program Officer of the Chicago Park District. He is a dedicated public administration and park and recreation professional who has served the City of Chicago through the Chicago Park District for twenty years. In his current role, Timothy is responsible for management of parks, programs, and people for one of the largest and most dynamic municipal recreation agencies in the world. Timothy's role is focused on creating programs, partnerships, and developing staff, while working with all Chicago neighborhoods and keeping community as the focus.

Timothy holds a BS in Recreational and Park Administration from Indiana University-Bloomington and an MPA from the University of Texas-Arlington.



## **Deborah Philbrick**

Program Officer, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation

In her current role, Deborah works with the director of the Climate Solutions team and other colleagues on all aspects of grantmaking strategies in the United States, China, and India. The working theory of change for the Climate Solutions team is based on the premise that if the United States, China, and India exert global leadership on climate change, then other nations will be compelled to act. Her previous role was as Senior Manager of Research & Innovation at Elevate Energy.

Deborah holds a BS in Ecology & Evolutionary Biology from the University of Rochester and an MS in Public Service Management from DePaul University.



## **Al Ponder**

Deputy Commander, Forest Preserve of Cook County

Al is a Deputy Commander in the Forest Preserve of Cook County, and a law enforcement professional with over fifteen years of experience in the Forest Preserves of Cook County. Al started out in patrol and moved through the ranks to her current role, where she supervises an average of twenty-five officers and two civilian staff members.

Al holds a BS in Business Marketing Communications from Columbia College, an MA in Conflict Resolution from Dominican University, and an MA in Counseling & Organizational Psychology from Adler University.



## **Veronica Reyes**

Vice President of Community Ownership, The Resurrection Project

Veronica is responsible for oversight, strategic management, and implementation of the Community Ownership's programs and initiatives, which includes Community Organizing, Neighborhood Planning, HOPE Family Services, and Policy Management. Veronica ensures that the communities The Resurrection Project serves are connected to the organization's programs and resources by establishing and maintaining positive external relationships with individuals, businesses, government, and community organizations. For the past thirteen years, Veronica has worked in community affairs and civic engagement in corporate, not-for-profit, and government sectors.

Veronica holds a BA in Latin American Studies from DePaul University.



## Shavion L. Scott

Director of Strategic Initiatives, Austin Coming Together (ACT)

Shavion joined ACT in 2018, bringing over twelve years of experience in personnel, fiscal, operations, and project management to her collective impact work on the West Side of Chicago. An urban planner and entrepreneur, Shavion has transferred private sector knowledge into nonprofit environments to empower communities and create spaces that revitalize, not displace. She has vast experience in economic development and is driven to cultivate strategic partnerships that are beneficial at all levels and across industries.

Shavion holds a Master of Urban Planning degree and a Certificate in Business from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.



## Nick Shields

Director of Communications and Public Affairs,  
Office of Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle

Nick is an award-winning communications professional serving as Director of Communications and Public Affairs for Offices under Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle. Previously, Nick served as Communications Director for Cook County Clerk David Orr and before that he oversaw communications for Navy Pier, Inc.

After graduating from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Nick worked as a journalist for the *Los Angeles Times* and *Baltimore Sun*. Additionally, Nick worked for *Chicago Tonight* as a producer and reporter where he won a local Emmy.



## Tiffany Sanders Sostrin

Deputy Director, Intergovernmental Affairs, City of Chicago, Office of the Mayor

Tiffany currently serves Mayor Lori Lightfoot as Deputy Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, where she oversees City Council activity. Tiffany also served as an Assistant Director in the City's Department of Finance and as an attorney for the City's Legislative Reference Bureau. Prior to her career with the City of Chicago, Tiffany spent several years as a management consultant for IBM, served U.S. District Judge Sharon Johnson Coleman, and interned for the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation.

Tiffany has a BS in Public Policy from Indiana University-Bloomington and graduated cum laude with a JD from Loyola University Chicago.



## Mary Joly Stein

Chief, Child Protection Division, Cook County State's Attorney's Office

As Chief of the Child Protection Division of the Cook County State's Attorney's Office, Mary leads a team of twenty-eight attorneys who collectively handle the thousands of cases of child abuse, neglect, and dependency pending in the Cook County Courts. She sits on multiple citizens' review panels and multidisciplinary teams charged with developing policy, strategies, and solutions aimed at strengthening families and addressing child abuse and neglect across the state.

Mary received her bachelor's degree from Canisius College and her JD from DePaul University.



## Meridel Trimble

Chief Operating Officer, One Million Degrees

As One Million Degrees' first COO, Meridel oversees the organization's finance, HR, research, and operations functions. Prior to joining OMD in 2017, Meridel worked in strategy at the City Colleges of Chicago. She previously served as a Presidential Management Fellow with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and as a fellow in the City of Chicago's Mayor's Office.

Meridel received her BA in Japanese and International Relations from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and an MPA from the University of Illinois at Chicago. She serves on the Board of Directors of Connections for Abused Women and their Children.



## **Vanessa Uribe**

Program Manager, Cook County, Bureau of Economic Development

Vanessa manages equitable and collaborative initiatives for Cook County's Bureau of Economic Development, including inclusive public-private partnerships, special initiatives like the 2020 Census, and the planning and launch of the County's Racial Equity Leadership Council. Previously, Vanessa managed the national affiliate network for Unidos US, the largest Latinx civil rights organization in the country, connecting grassroots community organizations to federal policy priorities and capacity-building opportunities. Vanessa currently serves on the Board of Enlace Chicago and proudly served as a 2019 Chicago United for Equity fellow.

Vanessa holds a BA in Political Science from Roosevelt University and an MPA from the University of Illinois at Chicago.



## **J. Gibran Villalobos**

Assistant Curator, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago

Gibran currently works as Assistant Curator in Performance and Public Practice at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. In 2017, Gibran launched an inaugural summit of Latinx artists and administrators across the U.S. In 2019, he was awarded the Field Foundation Leaders for a New Chicago Award as well as the Americans for the Arts Leaders of Color Fellowship. Gibran serves on the Auxiliary Board for the National Museum of Mexican Art and Chicago Artists Coalition Board of Directors. He is faculty lecturer at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in the Department of Arts Administration & Policy.

Gibran holds a BA in Art History and a BS in Public Relations from Northern Arizona University and an MA in Arts Administration & Policy and an MA in Modern Art History & Theory from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.



## **Erik Wallenius**

Chief of Staff, Office of Ald. Michele Smith (43<sup>rd</sup> Ward)

Erik brings to bear his experiences as an Eagle Scout, Army veteran, and proud South Sider in order to serve the City of Chicago. In his capacity as Chief of Staff to Alderman Michele Smith, Erik oversees the 43rd Ward office and advises on strategic communications, public policy and legislation, housing, infrastructure, development, education, and environmental matters. Prior to this position, Erik had a diverse array of private and public sector management roles across national, state, and local levels.

Erik received his BA in Philosophy and Political Science from Indiana University of Pennsylvania.



## **Jon Weber**

Director of School and Family Programs, Chicago Symphony Orchestra Association

As Director of School and Family Programs for the Negaunee Music Institute at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Jon oversees a diverse range of programming introducing children and adults to the extraordinary music making of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (CSO). From educational concerts to extensive partnerships with Chicago Public Schools to songwriting workshops for family members who have lost loved ones to gun violence, these programs provide broad access to the CSO, support music education, and serve the city through music.

Jon holds degrees in instrumental music performance from DePaul University and Temple University.

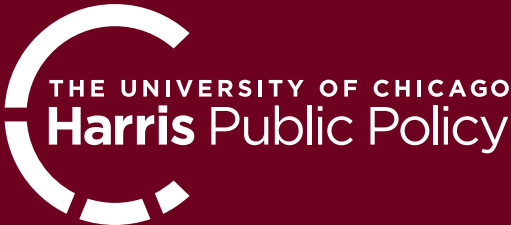


## **Audrey Wennink**

Director of Transportation, Metropolitan Planning Council (MPC)

Audrey directs MPC's transportation policy efforts and coordinates those initiatives with other urban planning programs. She leads transportation research and advocacy efforts, including advocating for transportation safety, integrating performance-based planning methods into transportation practice, pursuing sustainable funding for multimodal investments, and increasing transportation equity. Prior to MPC, Audrey was a national transportation planning and policy consultant for twelve years. Prior to her planning career, she served in various communications roles in Washington, DC, and Chicago.

Audrey holds BA in English and Spanish from Colby College and a Master of Urban Planning and Policy degree from the University of Illinois at Chicago.



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