

2021 Capstone Event



Speaker Bios



Riann Balch
Community Resources Manager, City of Chandler

As the Community Resources Manager for the city of Chandler, Ms. Balch oversees the city's federal community development programs, the delivery of social services, and the city's response to homelessness. She previously served as a Deputy Human Services Director at the City of Phoenix, Executive Director at the Arizona Housing Coalition, and Homeless Programs Coordinator at the Arizona Department of Economic Security.

Currently, Ms. Balch is honored to serve as the Chair of the Maricopa Regional Continuum of Care Board. She is an Arizona native, born and raised in Tucson. Balch lives in Chandler with her fiancé Jim and "fur babies" Turner and Phoebe.



Andrew Ching
City Manager, City of Tempe

Andrew Ching began serving the city of Tempe as City Manager in April 2013, following his appointment as Interim City Manager in January 2013. He served as the City Attorney from August 2006 to January 2013. Mr. Ching started his career in the Tempe City Attorney's Office as a volunteer in 1992, became a law clerk in 1993, and served as a contract attorney from 1995 to 1996. He left briefly from 1996 to 1998 to work in the Mesa City Prosecutor's Office, where he was named Prosecutor of the Year in 1997.

Mr. Ching worked as Assistant City Attorney from 1998 to 2005, and was named Senior Assistant City Attorney in 2004. He left the city in 2005 to work as an associate at Phoenix firm Moyes Storey in the areas of civil litigation, land use litigation, zoning law and local government law.

Mr. Ching was born in Tucson and raised in Tempe, and has been a Tempe resident for over 30 years. He received a Bachelor's degree from the University of Arizona in 1991 and earned a law degree from Arizona State University in 1994.



J. Crystal Dyches
City Manager, City of El Mirage

Crystal Dyches was appointed as the City Manager by the El Mirage City Council in June 2018, and has more than two decades of experience in local government. Prior to her service for El Mirage, she served as the City Manager in Page, Arizona, and Waseca, Minnesota, and as the City Administrator in St. Charles, Minnesota. Ms. Dyches also worked as the Neighborhood Programs Administrator in Chandler and as a Neighborhood Outreach Coordinator and Management Assistant II for the City of Mesa. Throughout Ms. Dyches' career, she has focused on developing partnerships and establishing community relationships, increasing transparency and community engagement in decision-making and implementing responsible stewardship of resources. She holds a Master of Public Administration from Arizona State University and a bachelor's degree in Social Science from Metropolitan State University in St. Paul, Minnesota.



The Honorable Kate Gallego
Mayor of the City of Phoenix

Since first being elected to the Phoenix City Council in 2013, Phoenix Mayor Kate Gallego's entrepreneurial spirit and extensive economic development knowledge have helped transform Phoenix's economy and revitalize the city's transportation system. Kate's proven track record includes leading the campaign to pass Phoenix's citywide transportation plan and spearheading the successful Phoenix Equal Pay Ordinance. Mayor Gallego is passionate about building a Phoenix that works for everybody. She led the effort for the city to partner with AARP to better serve older adults. She has worked with Councilwoman Debra Stark to support more young people entering the construction workforce, and Mayor Gallego has championed innovative partnerships with ASU and the University of Arizona. Gallego believes that everyone should have access to cutting edge medical care, and she has been the city council lead on expanding Phoenix's biomedical campus.

A strong proponent of investing in the infrastructure that Phoenix needs to grow, Mayor Gallego is a member of the bipartisan coalition Building America's Future. Her work on infrastructure has earned recognition from Women in Transportation and Friends of Transit. Her work on equity issues has earned her the recognition of the "Courage" Award from the Girl Scouts Cactus-Pine Council, Elected Official of the Year by the National Association of Social Workers Arizona Chapter, and the Rising Leader Award from the Anti-Defamation League. AZ Business Magazine named her as one of the most influential women in business.

Prior to being elected, Mayor Gallego worked on Strategic Planning and Economic Development for Salt River Project. She graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Harvard University and earned an MBA from the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania. In 2015, the Wharton School of Business named her in its "40 Under 40" list. She is the proud mom of Michael Gallego.



The Honorable John Giles
Mayor of the City of Mesa

John Giles was elected the 40th Mayor of Mesa, Arizona, in August 2014. Mayor Giles earned degrees from Brigham Young University in Political Science and Arizona State University's Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law. He has managed his own law firm in downtown Mesa for more than 20 years.

In 1996, Mr. Giles was elected to the Mesa City Council, and from 1998 to 2000, he served as Vice Mayor. After his service on the City Council, he remained active in the community and served on 25 boards and committees. Mayor Giles has been very involved in interfaith relations throughout the Phoenix metro area, including serving on the Board of the Arizona Interfaith Movement. As Mayor, he serves on numerous local and regional boards and committees.

Born and raised in Mesa, Mayor Giles graduated from Westwood High School in 1978. He is an active marathoner and triathlete who has completed two full Ironman competitions, 20 marathons and four Boston Marathons. In 2013, he was named "Mesa Man of the Year." Giles and his wife, Dawn, have been married for more than 30 years. They have five children and five grandchildren.



Tara Jackson
President, Arizona Town Hall

Tara Jackson has served as president of Arizona Town Hall since July of 2006. In this role, she oversees bringing diverse and often opposing parties together to solve the most complex and challenging issues facing the state. Prior to joining Arizona Town Hall, Ms. Jackson practiced commercial litigation for 16 years with a Phoenix-based law firm. She also has served in various leadership and advisor roles for state and federal bar associations, court and government systems, nonprofits, and business and educational organizations.



Carla Vargas Jasa
President and Chief Executive Officer, Valley of the Sun United Way

Carla Vargas Jasa joined the Valley of the Sun United Way in June 2019 as President and CEO after over 20 years with Orange County United Way, where she launched the countywide United to End Homelessness initiative. In 2020, United Way initiated a community engagement process while also responding to the needs that emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic, in partnership with the Valley's leading corporate, philanthropic and nonprofit and school leaders. As a result, in March 2021, United Way launched MC2026, a new five-year strategy to create Mighty Change in Maricopa County by teaming with corporate, nonprofit and community partners to achieve bold and measurable goals in Health, Housing and Homelessness, Education, and Workforce Development.



Robin Reed

President and Chief Executive Officer, Black Chamber of Arizona

Robin Reed is the President and CEO of the Black Chamber of Arizona and a Principal and Partner with EmFluenta corporate consulting company. EmFluenta helps leaders improve strategic execution, talent optimization and sales performance. Mr. Reed also co-produces and co-hosts a web series on the Social Television Network that focuses on Diversity & Inclusion best practices.



Rev. Katie Sexton-Wood

Executive Director, Arizona Faith Network

Rev. Katie Sexton-Wood came to Arizona Faith Network (AFN) with years of nonprofit experience specializing in ministry, leadership, interfaith work, and community organizing. She has a proven track record of building impactful communities who work to transform our world for the common good.

Before being hired as the permanent Executive Director of AFN, Rev. Sexton-Wood served as the Senior Pastor for Coolwater Christian Church in Scottsdale, Arizona. Prior to that, she worked for Grand Canyon University developing critical relationships and clinical partnership opportunities for student training, as a founding department manager for the Office of Field Experience in the College of Nursing and Health Care Professions.

Rev. Sexton-Wood has her M.S. in Nonprofit Management (2019), a Master of Divinity from Lexington Theological Seminary, and an M.A. in Christian Studies from Grand Canyon University. She is ordained with the Disciples of Christ church, and is a certified Community Organizer. She previously served as a member of AFN's Board of Directors and has volunteered her service on multiple committees.



Tom Simplot

Director, Arizona Department of Housing

Tom Simplot has been in leadership positions in the private sector and in local, state, and federal levels of government. Most recently, Simplot served as Senior Deputy Chair of the National Endowment for the Arts in Washington, D.C. He also was a longtime member of the Phoenix City Council and served as president and CEO of the Arizona Multihousing Association, a statewide trade association for the apartment industry in Arizona.

In his role at the National Endowment, Mr. Simplot served as Chief Operations Officer of a federal grant-making agency with over 150 employees and a budget of more than \$160 million. Mr. Simplot oversaw all grant-making programs, including Creative Forces, a healing arts network, in partnership with the Department of Defense. While on the Phoenix City Council, Simplot focused on housing, arts, and economic development, and led the effort to establish the first new-build permanent supportive housing apartment community in the City of Phoenix.

Mr. Simplot was a resident of Arizona for 35 years prior to moving to Washington and was very active in the community, serving on the boards of the Valley of the Sun United Way, Valle del Sol, Arizona Chamber of Commerce & Industry, and Phoenix Theatre. He also served as president of the Maricopa County Board of Health and the Maricopa County Industrial Development Authority.



Jami Snyder
Director, Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System

Jami Snyder serves as the director of AHCCCS, overseeing Arizona’s Medicaid and CHIP program, offering care to more than 2.2 million Arizona residents at an annual cost of \$14 billion. She was appointed by Governor Doug Ducey on January 5, 2019, after having served as the agency’s deputy director since December 2017. With more than 20 years of public and private sector experience in the health and human services industries, Ms. Snyder’s areas of expertise include regulatory oversight, policy making and leadership development.

Prior to joining AHCCCS, Ms. Snyder served as Medicaid Director for the state of Texas. She currently serves as the board president for the National Association of Medicaid Directors and is a 2013 Flinn-Brown Civic Leadership Academy Fellow. Ms. Snyder holds a master’s degree in political science from Arizona State University as well as a bachelor’s degree in political science from Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minnesota.



Trevor Southwick
Supportive Housing Manager, Arizona Housing Inc.

Trevor Southwick is a passionate social worker committed to creating innovative solutions to end homelessness. The majority of his career has been spent working tirelessly in the nonprofit sector engaging in direct practice services such as homeless outreach and permanent supportive housing efforts. Since 2019, Mr. Southwick moved into a management role with Arizona Housing Inc. (AHI) with the intention of utilizing the skills acquired through past direct practice service to develop a more effective and impactful programmatic approach to affordable and supportive housing with AHI.

Mr. Southwick also is a member of the Racial Equity Lived Experience Planning Team for the Lived Experience of Homelessness Advisory Council, which seeks to disrupt the structural racism that continues to persist across homelessness systems and create opportunity for the inclusion of voices of those with lived experience in the decision-making processes that directly impact them. Mr. Southwick recently graduated with a Bachelor of Social Work, summa cum laude, from Arizona State University and is currently pursuing the Advanced Standing Policy, Administration and Community Practice (PAC) Master of Social Work degree, also from Arizona State University.



Brian Swanton

President and Chief Executive Officer, Gorman & Company

Brian Swanton transitioned into the role of President and Chief Executive Officer for Gorman & Company in 2018, after serving as the Arizona Market President since 2008. During his tenure as Arizona Market President, Mr. Swanton led a multidisciplinary team that designed and constructed more than 1,000 units of new housing across the state with an emphasis on permanent supportive housing for families, seniors, veterans and chronically homeless populations in both urban and rural locations.



Ash Uss

Executive Director, From the Ground Up

Originally from Amityville, New York, Ms. Uss began working in homelessness in Phoenix at Andre House of Hospitality. She worked as a community advocate for additional shelter beds and was the principal investigator on a research study with 100 unsheltered individuals in downtown Phoenix. Ms. Uss is passionate about disrupting structural, institutional and cultural practices that criminalize homelessness and poverty. She also participates in a variety of regional efforts to end homelessness through the Arizona State Mental Health, Housing and Homelessness Workgroup and the City of Phoenix's Strategies to Address Homelessness Task Force.

As someone who once benefited from St. Vincent de Paul's services, Ms. Uss has a unique ability to relate to many of the individuals with which she works. In her new role as the Executive Director of From the Ground Up, she is excited to leverage the depth of her community relationships to collaborate with individuals and organizations to propose, design and implement compassionate responses to homelessness from the ground up.



The Honorable Jerry P. Weiers

Mayor, City of Glendale

Glendale Mayor Jerry Weiers is the current Chair of the Maricopa Association of Governments. Mayor Weiers is a husband, father, grandfather and devoted public servant who has spent his adult life owning and operating successful businesses, volunteering, and advocating for his community. He is currently serving his third, four-year term as Mayor. Prior to holding office in the city of Glendale, Mayor Weiers served four terms in the Arizona House of Representatives. His priority initiatives are fiscal responsibility, public safety, economic development, transportation systems, reducing homelessness, and support of Luke Air Force Base, military installations and veterans. He is a conservationist who understands the joys and trials of living the American dream by owning your own business. This perspective has served Glendale citizens well, as he continues to foster a culture of positive public-private partnerships that help the city grow and make a positive difference in people's lives.