
KEYNOTE SPEAKER BIOS

BUCKS-MONT COLLABORATIVE 2026 COMMUNITY SUMMIT

Bold on Purpose: Leading Audaciously, Together



Wednesday, May 20
9:30am-3:30pm
+ AM Networking



Gwynedd Mercy University



Dethra U. Giles

The Audacity Broker®, 5x TEDx Speaker, CEO of ExecuPrep, and
Author of *That's Not What I Said*

Dethra Giles is the voice organizations call when communication breaks down and culture is on the line.

A sought-after speaker, executive coach, and strategist, Dethra helps companies, leaders, and teams transform how they show up, speak up, and lead across lines of power, perspective, and difference.

With a background in leadership development, organizational development, and conflict navigation, she delivers more than inspiration—she delivers infrastructure for how people work together when the stakes are high. Her proprietary frameworks, including the award-winning DARE™ model, have helped thousands of professionals master difficult conversations, navigate change, and turn tension into clarity.

Dethra has served clients across industries, Fortune 500s, startups, academic institutions, and government agencies, earning a reputation as the person who can shift rooms, reset teams, and move missions forward. Her approach is bold, insightful, and always rooted in the belief that culture is not what you say, it's how you communicate, lead, and live it out.

When she's not on stage or advising the C-suite, Dethra is teaching the world how to master conflict with conversational competence in her book, *That's Not What I Said*. She's also a weekly voice on the nationally syndicated Willie Moore Jr. Show, helping professionals move from the cubicle to the corner office with strategy and audacity.



Dr. Veirdre Jackson

**Deputy Chief of Training, Development, and Multicultural Initiatives
for Montgomery County, PA**

As the Deputy Chief of Training, Development, and Multicultural Initiatives for Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, Dr. Veirdre Jackson brings her passion for cultivating emotionally intelligent, equity-driven, and resilient leadership to a countywide stage. She leads the design and facilitation of transformative professional learning, strengthens partnerships across systems and communities, and champions environments rooted in trust, psychological safety, and belonging. With a deep commitment to elevating community voice and guiding leaders through complex challenges, Dr. Jackson advances inclusive excellence that honors the dignity and worth of every resident.

With more than 20 years of leadership experience and as CEO of Living Strong Consulting, Dr. Jackson is a visionary leader, educator, and entrepreneur dedicated to helping businesses, educational institutions, leaders, and professionals overcome burnout, enhance communication, boost productivity, and strengthen team relationships. Her work centers on fostering belonging and resilience to create thriving environments where individuals and teams can reach their full potential. As an award-winning author, keynote speaker, and consultant, Dr. Jackson's dynamic expertise has impacted organizations across sectors.

Through her R.E.F.I.L.L. Framework—which includes strategies to Rewire for Relationships, Embrace Emotional Health, Find Strength in Community, Influence Others, Let IT Go, and Level Up—Dr. Jackson delivers practical, transformative tools for addressing burnout, managing stress, and building authentic connections in fast-paced professional settings.



Dr. Veirdre Jackson (Continued)

Dr. Jackson's influence spans diverse audiences, including educators, corporate leaders, administrators, and clinicians. She has collaborated with leading organizations, including:

- Lakeside Global Institute, where she served as a mentor trainer.
- Penn State Extension, developing online trauma responsive courses.
- Head Start and Early Head Start, as a coach for classroom and home visiting staff.
- Numerous charter schools, public school districts, and intermediate units, as a Relational Coach.

Dr. Jackson's work with these organizations underscores her commitment to improving communication, building trust, and fostering sustainable growth.

Her John Maxwell Team Certification elevates her leadership training capabilities, allowing her to facilitate transformative workshops, mastermind sessions, and one-on-one coaching. She covers topics such as Today Matters, Leadership Gold, Becoming a Person of Influence, and The 15 Invaluable Laws of Growth, empowering professionals to achieve personal and organizational success.

From 2021- 2023, she was also the host of the popular Living Strong: The Flip Side of Adversity LIVE radio show on the Voice America Network's Empowerment Channel, which reached over 100,000 listeners across 75 countries. In 2024, she expanded her reach by launching a podcast of the same name on Podbean and YouTube, syndicated to platforms like Spotify, Apple Play, iHeartRadio, and Amazon Music. The podcast features inspiring stories and actionable advice for navigating adversity in relationships, leadership, health, and mindset.

As an accomplished author, Dr. Jackson has published several impactful works:

- 16 Principles for Abundant Living (2016), a guide for women's empowerment.
- Fearless Conversations with a Limitless God (2019), an award-winning exploration of breaking toxic thought cycles. Recognized with two Silver Medals from BookFest and featured on the Nasdaq board in Times Square, this book continues to inspire readers globally.
- R.E.F.I.L.L.: 6 Strategies to Reconnect, Rejuvenate, & Restore with Soul Care (2024 eBook), a vital resource for navigating the demands of professional caregiving and rediscovering purpose and fulfillment.



Dr. Veirdre Jackson (Continued)

In 2025, Dr. Jackson released the eBook, *Belonging Over Barriers: Unlocking The Art of Belonging in Business, Personal Power, and Collective Impact*. This groundbreaking series equips leaders and teams with skills to create authentic belonging, foster empathy, and drive innovation in today's professional landscape.

Dr. Jackson's expertise has earned her numerous accolades, including:

- Recognition as a Professional Development Champion by Pennsylvania's Keystone Stars Southeast Regional Key.
- Selection as an Author Allstar in 2023 and 2024.
- Honoree of the 2023 Exchange Leadership Initiative, which celebrates visionary leaders in early care and education.

She is also a featured presenter for the Trauma and Child Development Series by Penn State's Better Kid Care, a contributor to Women's Entrepreneur Magazine, and a sought-after keynote and podcast guest.

Dr. Jackson holds a Bachelor's degree from Drexel University, a Master's degree in Elementary Education from Temple University, and a Doctoral Degree in Leadership and Innovation from Wilmington University. Her academic foundation supports her innovative approaches to leadership, community building, and resilience.

Outside of her professional life, Dr. Jackson cherishes her roles as a wife, mother of two daughters, and GiGi to her three grandchildren: Max, Jaxon, and Ceres. Her family inspires her continued commitment to creating meaningful, lasting change for the next generation.

With her deep understanding of organizational systems, trauma-informed practices, and leadership development, Dr. Veirdre Jackson is uniquely positioned to guide businesses, schools, and professionals toward success. Whether addressing burnout, enhancing communication, or fostering belonging, she delivers actionable solutions that inspire transformation and drive results.

AUDACIOUS LEADERSHIP SESSION

SPEAKER BIO

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Gwynedd Mercy University

Audacious Leadership: You Are Bigger Than You Think – Leading Self and Serving Teams



Tiffany Tavarez

**Vice President, Community Impact and Strategic Partnerships,
Jefferson Office of Community Health & Impact**

Tiffany Tavarez serves as Vice President of Community Impact and Strategic Partnerships for Jefferson’s Office of Community Health & Impact, which is responsible for aligning community impact and health equity through engagement initiatives across the entire Jefferson enterprise, enhancing the experience of patients, students, members and colleagues. Prior to Jefferson, she held various roles – managing philanthropy, stakeholder engagement, communications and program development – at Wells Fargo, Exelon, Comcast, Temple University, and the Pew Center for Arts and Heritage.

She has been recognized with numerous awards from across the region for her leadership and civic engagement. In 2025, the Salvation Army of Eastern Pennsylvania bestowed her the prestigious Eliza Shirley Women in Leadership Award. In 2024, Hispanic Style Magazine named her one of the top Latina Influencers in the Northeast region. In 2023, Tiffany was recognized as one of the Top Women and Top Latino Power Players by Metro Philadelphia; was named a Woman of Influence by the Philadelphia Business Journal and City & State Pennsylvania Top 100 Leaders in Diversity. She was also named a 2023 Marshall Memorial Fellow (MMF). MMF is the German Marshall Fund’s flagship leadership development program to introduce a new generation of leaders from business, government and civil society to expand their understanding of transatlantic relations with the EU, and to create new networks and opportunities for global collaboration. During the fellowship, she had the opportunity to network and engage with leaders across Moldova, Italy, Belgium and Germany.



Tiffany Tavaréz (Continued)

Additionally, she serves as Vice Chair of Esperanza as well as Board Emerita of Monument Lab; advisor to LULAC Philadelphia, Champion of Impact for Philadelphia Youth Basketball's 2026 Sneaker Ball and serves on the Highmark Mann Center for the Performing Arts Golden Gala 50th Anniversary Committee. Tiffany Tavaréz is a first-generation college graduate who has earned degrees from both Temple University and University of the Arts.

BOLD IN THE CROSSWINDS SESSION
SPEAKER BIOS

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Gwynedd Mercy University

Bold in the Crosswinds: Courageous Advocacy When the Stakes Are High

Panelists



Obed Arango

Executive Director, Centro de Cultura, Arte, Trabajo y Educacion (CCATE)



Phyllis Chamberlain

Executive Director, Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania



Dr. Jeannine L. Lisitski

President & CEO, Mental Health Partnerships



Julie Platt

Director of Policy and External Affairs, Mental Health Partnerships



Jon Rubin

CEO, Pennel Mental Health Center

Moderator



Yocasta Lora

Associate State Director of Advocacy & Community Engagement,
AARP Pennsylvania | 2025 Zhi-Xing Eisenhower Fellow



Obed Arango

Executive Director, Centro de Cultura, Arte, Trabajo y Educacion (CCATE)

Obed Arango Hisijara is a Mexican photographer, visual artist, anthropologist, journalist, university professor, and media producer. He holds an MA in Cultural Anthropology and a BA in Communications.

His area of expertise is Latin America: a beautiful land full of life, promise, and beautiful people, whose essence he sees, captures, and shares through the depth of his voice and the artistic expression of his photojournalistic pieces.



[Phyllis Chamberlain](#)

Executive Director, Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania

Phyllis Chamberlain is the Executive Director of the Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania, a statewide organization dedicated to ensuring that all Pennsylvanians—especially those with low incomes—have access to safe, decent, affordable, and accessible homes.

She brings more than thirty years of experience in public policy advocacy, technical assistance, community engagement, and communications. Before joining the Housing Alliance, Phyllis served as Director of Field Mobilization at the National Alliance to End Homelessness and as Executive Director of both the Virginia Coalition to End Homelessness and the Homeless Planning Council of Delaware.



Dr. Jeannine L. Lisitski

President & CEO, Mental Health Partnerships

Dr. Jeannine L. Lisitski joined Mental Health Partnerships in 2024 as President & Chief Executive Officer. She brings decades of management and leadership experience in the nonprofit sector, emphasizing community collaboration and innovation in mental health services.

Dr. Lisitski has served in various executive roles in organizations dedicated to alleviating violence, poverty, and behavioral health issues. Her notable positions include CEO for Council for Relationships, Executive Director & President of Women Against Abuse (WAA), and Vice President of Program Operations for Project H.O.M.E.

Under her leadership at WAA, the organization saw exponential growth in all service areas, enhanced its infrastructure, and achieved certification in the Sanctuary Model of trauma-informed care.

Beginning her career in social work, Dr. Lisitski provided direct counseling and case management services, giving her a solid foundation in mental health and behavioral health care. Her leadership has been recognized with multiple awards for business acumen and social innovation.

Notably, Dr. Lisitski led a citywide initiative to address relational violence, collaborating with over 60 agencies and organizations. This effort earned the first-place award for the international Lipman Family Prize for social innovation from The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania.



Dr. Jeannine L. Lisitski (Continued)

A New Jersey native and Philadelphia resident, Dr. Lisitski's academic credentials include a Ph.D. in Social Work and Social Research from Bryn Mawr College, an M.A. in Applied Psychology from Rowan University, and a B.A. in Criminal Justice from Stockton University.

She also holds certificates in executive leadership from Bryn Mawr College and Harvard Business School and has co-facilitated the Bryn Mawr College executive leadership program.

Dr. Lisitski is passionate about learning, empowering teams, and implementing programs and systems that alleviate suffering. Through effective mental health initiatives, she aims to foster a more peaceful, flourishing, and united community.



Julie Platt

Director of Policy and External Affairs, Mental Health Partnerships

Julie Platt, MPH, MSW, is currently the Director of Policy and External Affairs at Mental Health Partnerships (MHP).

MHP is a multi-county nonprofit that specializes in certified peer specialist trainings, homeless outreach, and recovery-centered learning. In this role, she has been instrumental in educating elected officials on the impact of the One Big Beautiful Bill and in helping to direct funding in PA's Rural Health Transformation Plan. She previously worked at a bipartisan lobbying firm where some of her clients included multinational corporations, labor unions, and civil rights organizations. She has played a key role in passing significant legislation, including Philadelphia's paid COVID-19 sick leave, the Whole Home Repairs program, and increased funding for public schools.

Julie has worked at the intersection of public health, social work, and politics throughout her career, channeling her passion into meaningful, systemic change. She has been recognized with several awards, including being named one of Pittsburgh Incline's "Who's Next in Politics" and being featured in City & State's inaugural statewide "40 Under 40."

Julie is a Spark member of the Forum for Executive Women, a rising leader at Project HOME, and serves on the boards of JJPI and the Philadelphia Film Society's Young Friends.



Jon Rubin
CEO, Pennadel Mental Health Center

Jon Rubin is a passionate human services leader, with over 30 years of experience in the field.

Prior to joining Pennadel, Jon has been serving as a Principal with Health Management Associates leading strategic planning processes, stakeholder engagement practices, and system redesign efforts with human services systems across the country. Previously Jon served as deputy secretary of the Office of Children, Youth and Families at the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS). In this role, he led the state's child welfare and juvenile justice services programs. During this time, Jon worked collaboratively with other DHS agencies to ensure accessibility of services and support of underserved populations.

Jon had previously served as director of Housing and Human Services for over five years in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. In this role, he was the leader for public human services for the County including child welfare; aging; housing; mental health; drug and alcohol; Medicaid behavioral services; and intellectual disability services. During this time, Jon focused the County's work on developing a more integrated model of human services delivery and building the public and private partnerships necessary to address the community's health-related social needs.

Jon started his career as a child welfare social worker, providing direct service work and caseworker supervision before assuming progressive leadership roles.



Jon Rubin (Continued)

Additional past roles include senior consultant with Deloitte, director of Organizational Effectiveness and Leadership Development with the American Public Human Services Association, and acting director and practice improvement specialist with the Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center.

Jon holds a Master of Social Work from Temple University and a Bachelor of Arts in Social Work from Pennsylvania State University. He is the recipient of the 2019 Dennis Marion Award for contributions to behavioral health services in Pennsylvania. Jon remains focused on ensuring the delivery of equitable, accessible, and high-quality human services.



Yocasta Lora

**Associate State Director of Advocacy & Community Engagement,
AARP Pennsylvania | 2025 Zhi-Xing Eisenhower Fellow**

Yocasta Lora is a strategic leader in community development, public policy, and inclusive advocacy. As Associate State Director at AARP Pennsylvania, she advances statewide strategies that strengthen livable, equitable, and resilient communities for 1.8 million members. Her work spans affordable housing, transportation, green spaces, mobility, multicultural outreach, volunteer engagement, and age-friendly policy innovation.

A trusted collaborator across government, nonprofit, private and civic sectors, Yocasta serves on Governor Josh Shapiro's Pennsylvania Commission for Women and contributes to major regional initiatives focused on aging, housing, economic empowerment, and urban revitalization: Philadelphia250, ShareFood Program, and Montgomery County DEI Advisory Committee.

In 2025, she was named a Zhi-Xing Eisenhower Fellow, reflecting her global perspective on leadership and multigenerational community building.

Recognized as one of Pennsylvania's leading changemakers, Yocasta brings a bicultural lens and a bold vision to advancing communities where people of all ages can thrive.

BOLD AND READY: A LEADER'S GUIDE TO AI SESSION

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Bold and Ready: A Leader's Guide to AI for Mission-Driven Organizations



Brian Pickell
Chief Executive Officer
KPIInterface

Brian Pickell is the CEO and Co-Founder of KPIInterface, with over 25 years of experience helping nonprofit organizations use technology to strengthen security, efficiency, and mission impact.

With a deep professional and personal commitment to the nonprofit community, Brian brings a practical, mission-first approach to IT strategy and cybersecurity. Under his leadership, KPIInterface has been recognized with MSP 501 and Philadelphia 100 awards for innovation and growth.

**MINEE YOUR CAREER
SPEAKER BIO**

2026
Community Summit
Keynote Speaker

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Dethra U. Giles

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THE CONFLICTED WORLD IS IN THE ROOM SESSION

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The Conflicted World Is in the Room: Leading Through Conflict and Restoring Trust



Quaiser Abdullah, PhD

Assistant Professor of Instruction, Lew Klein College of Media and Communication, Temple University

Program Director, Master of Science in Communication Management (Klein College)

Dr. Quaiser Abdullah teaches courses on adult learning, leadership, communication, conflict resolution, organizational development, research methods and technology in educational settings in the Communication and Social Influence Department in Klein College.

Dr. Abdullah's research interests center around leadership, organizational development, and identity and conflict. He has a number of published interviews on the topic of religion and identity in public spaces in various news media. He plans to continue his research in the area of leadership development and how it impacts identity formation in minority communities.

He is currently seeking funding for a research project on conflict resolution training in Muslim private schools and parochial schools in the United States. He is also a frequent guest presenter to local and national audiences on topics relating to Islam, identity, and conflict.

Dr. Abdullah is a certified conflict resolution in education trainer, professional coach, positive discipline educator and a trained mediator and conflict coach. He is also a Conwell Fellow and was recently awarded a Temple-funded grant to develop a course on social entrepreneurship and help coordinate workshops centering on social entrepreneurship as it relates to workforce development.