

2023 Statewide Conference on Philanthropy Breakout Session Bios

Breakout 1 | 10:45am-11:45am

Identifying Root Causes (Workshop)

Ugwuji N. Maduekwe MD, MMSc, MPH, FACS

Associate Professor and Director of Regional Therapies, Division of Surgical Oncology, Department of Surgery, Medical College of Wisconsin

Ugwuji is the co-director of the Advancing Cancer Equity in Surgery research collaborative and the Deputy Director of the Advancing a Healthier Wisconsin Endowment, a role in which she is focused on supporting actionable projects focused on making Wisconsin the healthiest state. Her clinical focus is on peritoneal surface malignancies and gastric cancer while her research focuses on how variations in patterns of surgical oncologic care in gastrointestinal malignancies lead to health disparities. Dr. Maduekwe has an undergraduate degree in molecular and cellular biology from the University of Texas at Dallas, underwent medical training at Harvard Medical School, general surgery residency at Massachusetts General Hospital, and complex general surgical oncology fellowship at the University of Pittsburgh.



Sheri Johnson

Director of Population Health Institute, Principal Investigator of County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, Professor (CHS) of Population Health Sciences, University of Wisconsin - Madison

Sheri is currently Director of the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, Principal Investigator of County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, and Professor (CHS) of Population Health Sciences. Dr. Johnson is a member of the National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine's Roundtable on Population Health Improvement. She has dedicated her career to partnering with children, families, community organizations and systems to advance health and well-being.



Marjory Givens

Associate Director of Population Health Institute, Assistant Professor (CHS) of Population Health Sciences, University of Wisconsin - Madison

Marjory is the Associate Director of the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute (UWPHI), and Assistant Professor (CHS) of Population Health Sciences. Marjory's scholarship and practice aim to advance health and equity through research, education and service that supports accurate diagnosis of core social problems and shifts power relations to shape community conditions in ways that improve health for all.



Soraya Willems-Neal

Organizing Academic Public Health Coordinator, Population Health Institute, University of Wisconsin - Madison

Soraya is the Organizing Academic Public Health Coordinator at the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, where she supports the development of innovative practices to embed a power analysis in academic spaces across the country. As a former Program Officer for the Just Recovery for Racial Equity Initiative, Soraya played a pivotal role in implementing and overseeing grant programs aimed at promoting health equity and improving social determinants of health. Her work not only focused on compliance but also on creating monitoring and evaluation systems that humanize grantees. She is passionate and committed to working on systems that empower individuals to reach their full potential.



Opportunities in Capacity Building (Panel)

Scott Gelzer

Donor & Philanthropy Advocate

Scott was the last Executive Director of Milwaukee's Faye McBeath Foundation, which closed its doors in 2014. Past Board service includes the WI Philanthropy Network and Exponent Philanthropy. Scott serves on the Advisory Board for the Crawford County Community Fund. He has returned to coaching and consulting with nonprofit organizations and donors on a part-time basis. Interests include organizational assessment, financing nonprofit organizations, rural philanthropy, and training for nonprofit Board Presidents. Work in philanthropy with donors and nonprofit leaders is a personal passion. He supports two donor-advised funds as memorials to family members. He is also an individual donor and volunteer for selected causes. After 20 years in Milwaukee and 4 years in Lake Geneva, he lives on the Mississippi River aka Wisconsin's west coast. Friends and family, heritage travel, and living a full life in Wisconsin's Driftless Region are personal priorities.



Rashad Cobb

Chief Operating Officer, Brown County United Way

Rashad serves as Chief Operating Officer for Brown County United Way, where he is responsible for working with the President & CEO to implement the organization's strategic plan and provide management of the organization's operations. Nonprofit work calls Rashad because it provides an opportunity to contribute to community while continually building upon relationships with partners that enhance the quality of life for residents in the Greater Green Bay community. Rashad currently serves as a City of Green Bay Police and Fire Commission commissioner and in 2022 he was named Green Bay Citizen of the Year.



Tom Linfield

Vice President, Madison Community Foundation

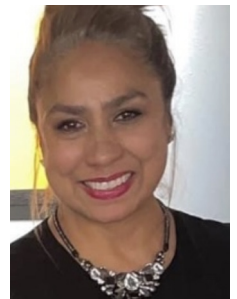
Tom is the Vice President of Community Impact at Madison Community Foundation (MCF). Tom has more than 30 years of experience in the non-profit world, focusing on arts, higher education, public television and community grantmaking and grantwriting. In his current role, he coordinates all competitive and field of interest grantmaking, offers capacity building, counsel and facilitation to non-profits, and serves on the leadership team for the Foundation. Tom co-chairs the national community foundation Program Officer's Network (ProNet) and served on the conference committees of Wisconsin Philanthropy Network and CFUnited 2020. His board service has included the Bolz School of Arts Administration at the UW-Madison, Leadership Greater Madison Alumni Association, The Evjue Foundation, The Henry Vilas Zoo, and Operation Fresh Start. He is a fellow of The Funders Network PLACES program. Tom is fluent in French and German and is a practicing fine artist, exhibiting his sculpture, mosaics and drawings regularly. An active educator, Tom has presented on a wide array of topics and regularly provides grantsmanship workshops.



Martina Gollin-Graves, MSW, APSW

CEO, Mental Health America Wisconsin

Martina is the President, and CEO of Mental Health America of Wisconsin (MHA) a statewide agency providing education, advocacy, and support for individuals, families, businesses, and community organizations across the state of Wisconsin. She is a nonprofit leader and social justice advocate with over 20 years of experience. Martina is committed to advocacy efforts that support expanded access to community-based mental health care for our most vulnerable community members. Her work is driven by MHA's commitment to promoting mental health as a critical part of overall wellness with a core belief that there is no health without mental health.



Understanding the Fearless Fund Lawsuit (Presentation)

Von Bryant

Partner, Foley and Lardner, LLP

Von is passionate about working with clients to solve business problems and obtain optimal outcomes, focusing his practice on helping companies achieve success in business with a strategic and pragmatic approach. He is a partner in the firm's Transactions, Private Equity, Venture Capital and Fund Formation & Investment Management Practices, as well as the Sports & Entertainment Industry Team. Von's practice is concentrated on the representation of investors, start-up companies, and mature businesses, and focuses on venture capital financings and private equity transactions, M&A and investment fund formation. His broad corporate practice also includes regularly counseling clients on technology licensing, commercial agreements, corporate governance matters and general business counseling.



Ryan Zerwer

President & CEO, Forward Community Investments

Ryan is a leading investor, connector, and advisor helping to build a more equitable and inclusive Wisconsin. Prior to FCI, Ryan was partner, CEO & president of Clotho Digital for over a decade and brings years of real estate investment and tech industry experience to his role at FCI. Originally from the northern suburbs of Chicago, Ryan studied economics at Carleton College in Minnesota before migrating to Madison, Wisconsin in 2000. Ryan is passionate about seeing Madison's prosperity reach more residents of color and serves on the Board of Directors for Maydm, Inc. He currently lives with his wife Rachael and their two daughters on Madison's west-side. Ryan is an avid outdoorsman and can often be found cycling the hills of Western Dane County or paddling in the Boundary Waters Wilderness Area in Minnesota.



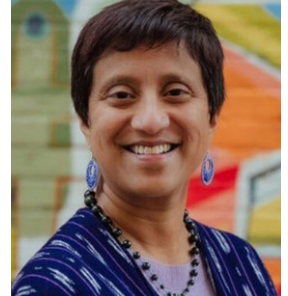
Breakout 2 | 1:15pm-2:15pm

Measuring Impact with Trust-Based Philanthropy (Panel)

Brenda Solorzano

CEO, Headwaters Foundation

A change maker and firm believer in the power of community, Brenda works to drive innovation and continuous learning while reserving time for play. Brenda has dedicated her career to making a positive impact in the philanthropic world, focusing on issues related to community health and health policy that affect vulnerable populations. She believes that meaningful change happens when communities come together to engage in good work. Brenda is a founding member of the Trust-Based Philanthropy Project and continues to serve on their steering committee. Brenda holds bachelor's degrees in history and political science, as well as a juris doctorate. She is a member of the California State Bar Association and a Terrance Keenan Emerging Leader in Philanthropy Fellow. Currently residing in Montana, Brenda is learning to be an avid lover of the great outdoors, alongside her husband and two children.



Noah Salata

Community and Social Impact Advisor, American Family Insurance Dreams Foundation

As a trust-based advocate Noah focuses on using philanthropy and grantmaking to contribute to more equitable, just, and connected communities. As a community and social impact advisor for the American Family Insurance Dreams Foundation, he believes that the antiquated and systemic challenges of philanthropy can be reduced through creating collaborative relationships, centering equity, and intentional power-sharing. In support of a better philanthropic ecosystem, he also serves as a member of the Advisory Board at the University of Wisconsin's Center for Community and Nonprofit Studies and on the programming committee for the Wisconsin Philanthropy Network. Noah has undergraduate degrees in Communications and English and received his MBA in Organizational Leadership from Norwich University. He loves calling Madison, WI home and is always willing to talk more about unrestricted funding.



Nicole Smith

Program Officer, Roots and Wings Foundation

Nicole brings a passion for service and learning, along with 30 years of experience in public health programs and policy. She started her public health career as a program officer for Federally Qualified Health Centers. Nicole also worked at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for 20 years in a variety of policy and programmatic positions, including assignments with the World Health Organization in Africa and Asia. In her spare time, Nicole enjoys living in the Pacific Northwest – all its beauty and all its rain -- where she uses the weather as an excuse to stay indoors to try new recipes (and hopes that her husband will like them, too).



Steward Responsively by Reframing Risk (Workshop)

Vanessa Elkan

Senior Programs and Knowledge Manager, PEAK Grantmaking

Vanessa Elkan joined PEAK Grantmaking as the senior programs and knowledge manager in 2023. In this role, she oversees the development of PEAK's educational content, knowledge-sharing, and community engagement strategies that support the leadership and skill development of our members and emergent learning network in philanthropy. Vanessa brings over 17 years of experience managing grantmaking, leadership development, and research initiatives in philanthropy and government. She began her career as a funder at the Southern Education Foundation (SEF), advocating for social justice and a high-quality education for all people in the South. As SEF's director of strategic initiatives for the office of the president, she developed research, policy analysis, and regional learning networks advancing early childhood education and ending the school-to-prison pipeline. After SEF, Vanessa served as the program officer of resource deployment for the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta, where she led grantmaking programs for education initiatives and the scholarships program.



Policy Trends (Presentation)

Rob Henken

President, Wisconsin Policy Forum

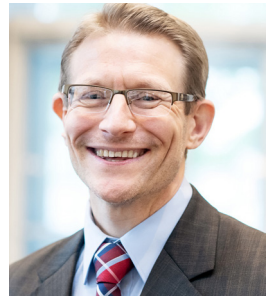
Rob is the President of the Wisconsin Policy Forum. Before joining the Forum in 2008, he worked in Milwaukee County Government for nearly 10 years, serving as Director of Research for the County Board, Director of Health and Human Services, and Director of Administrative Services. Prior to moving to Milwaukee in 1994, he worked for seven years on Capitol Hill as a senior aide to two congressmen and as staff director for a House of Representatives foreign affairs subcommittee. Rob was honored as the 2019 Person of the Year by the Milwaukee Rotary Club and was named one of Milwaukee's 100 most influential leaders in The Milwaukee Business Journal's annual "Power Book" in 2012 and one of Milwaukee's "Game Changers" by M Magazine in 2013.



Jason Stein

Vice President and Research Director, Wisconsin Policy Forum

Jason is the Vice President and Research Director of the Wisconsin Policy Forum, where he focuses on researching state and local government out of the group's Madison office and on building up the Forum's relationships and members in the area. Before joining the Forum, Jason worked as a Capitol reporter for the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel and for the Wisconsin State Journal. He is the author with Patrick Marley of "More than They Bargained For: Scott Walker, Unions and the Fight for Wisconsin." His work has been recognized by journalism groups such as the American Society of News Editors, the Society of American Business Editors and Writers, and the Association of Capitol Reporters and Editors. Milwaukee Magazine also named him as one of the city's most influential media figures in 2015.



Sara Shaw

Senior Education Researcher, Wisconsin Policy Forum

Sara is the senior education policy researcher for the Wisconsin Policy Forum. Before joining the Forum, Sara worked as a senior manager with the Illinois State Board of Education and directed K-12 policy for the Illinois Secretary of Education. Sara began her career teaching in Milwaukee. Sara holds an M.A. in education from Marquette University, an A.B. in comparative literature from Princeton University, and a certificate in education finance from Georgetown University.



Breakout 3 | 2:30pm-3:30pm

Community-Driven Philanthropy (Panel)

Tony Shields

President/CEO, Wisconsin Philanthropy Network

In his role as President and CEO, Tony leads all aspects of strategy and operations for Wisconsin Philanthropy Network (WPN) - the state's only organization devoted exclusively to the profession and practice of philanthropy. Prior to joining WPN, Tony served as Executive Director of United Neighborhood Centers of Milwaukee (UNCOM) and as publisher of the Milwaukee Neighborhood News Service. Before UNCOM, he led Community Relations efforts for Harley-Davidson, Inc. Tony also held community and public relations leadership/executive positions for organizations including Milwaukee Bucks Professional Basketball Inc., the Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee, and public relations and marketing firms. Tony has been recognized for his leadership by the Cardinal Stritch University Alumni Association, Milwaukee Community Journal, Milwaukee Radio Alliance and Madison 365 publication. Tony holds both a Master of Science in Management and Bachelor of Arts Degree in Interpersonal Communications from Cardinal Stritch University where he also serves as Adjunct Faculty in the University's College of Business and Management.



Carolyn Desrosiers

Community Engagement Manager, Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region

Carolyn is a dynamic nonprofit leader currently serving as Community Engagement Manager for the Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region based in Appleton, WI. As a Grantmaker she is known for removing barriers for grassroots, rural and marginalized-led community organizations, simplifying processes, and developing authentic relationships with grantees. Carolyn was recognized in 2023 as a Northeast WI "40 Under 40" by Insight Magazine, and in 2016 as a Fox Cities "Future 15" by the Fox Cities Chamber of Commerce. She is a passionate advocate for equity, diversity, and inclusion and was recognized for this work in 2019 with the Lawrence University D&I Champion Award. She is currently working on her Masters in Public Administration online through Claremont Lincoln University with a Fellowship from the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy.



Juli Aulik

Community Relations Director, UW Health

Juli has been director of community relations at UW Health since 2002. She leads UW Health's contributions program, community benefit reporting, and local government relations and serves as the health system's chief liaison to the communities it serves. With a cross-functional team, Juli led the 2018 redesign of UW Health's giving program to align with strategic community health and diversity, equity, and inclusive priorities as well as the principles of trust-based giving. Juli collaborates on community health improvement, the community dimension of population health, UW Health's role in regional economic development, and diversity, equity, and inclusion work.



Chrissy Widmayer

Director of Community Powered, Wisconsin Humanities

Chrissy is the Director of Wisconsin Humanities' Community Powered initiative. As the Director, she co-developed (with Dr. Arijit Sen) a humanities and place-based curriculum to help communities recognize, communicate, and act upon their strengths, challenges, and histories. She then trained four project coordinators in those humanities methods and supported them in piloting community-led projects in their communities. Chrissy has a PhD in Folklore Studies from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and an MFA in Creative Writing from George Mason University. Her research explores how communities create connections using storytelling and food traditions. She has spent over a decade teaching writing, oral history, and folklore in Wisconsin and Virginia. In her spare time, Chrissy crochets and makes linocut art prints inspired by nature and her midwestern roots. Chrissy is also a co-founder of WiseFolk Productions and content creator for Folkwise.



Erin Frederick

Program Director, Zilber Family Foundation

Erin serves as program director for the Zilber Family Foundation where she works closely with the Executive Director to design and implement the Foundation's grantmaking focused on increasing residents' access to social and economic opportunities. She has primary responsibility for grants management, staff management, community engagement, and internal operations. Erin has been with the Foundation since 2010, serving in the roles of program officer and senior program officer before assuming the role of program director in 2018. During her time at the Foundation, she has developed the Foundation's capacity building strategy and grantmaking portfolio to include organizational effectiveness and leadership development opportunities for grantee partners. Erin graduated from Miami University with degrees in communications and Spanish and has a Master's in Nonprofit Management and Leadership from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. She is the board chair for Wisconsin Philanthropy Network, Wisconsin's regional association of grantmakers.



Embracing Learning in Practice (Workshop)

Amy Washbush, PhD

Associate Director, Center for Community and Nonprofit Studies (the CommNS), University of Wisconsin - Madison

Amy is the Associate Director of the Center for Community and Nonprofit Studies (the CommNS) of the University of Wisconsin-Madison. A community-based researcher and evaluator, Dr. Washbush leads the CommNS Co-Create team of staff, graduate students, and undergraduate students in projects that help others answer important questions to advance their missions. The CommNS Co-Create team works with nonprofits, funders, and others in community assessments, program evaluations, data and evaluation capacity-building, community advisory boards, research-to-practice program planning, and more. Dr. Washbush lives in a cohousing community in Madison with her partner, three children, and their cat, Willow.



Rural Livability (Presentation)

Marie Barry

Director of Community Economic Development, Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative

Marie currently serves as the Director of Community Economic Development at the Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative where she leads RWHC's efforts to utilize one of rural communities' greatest assets - their hospitals - as a driver of economic development. RWHC is a cooperative of 44 rural hospitals across Wisconsin that has provided shared services and acted as an advocate for our member hospitals for over 40 years. Marie has an undergraduate degree from UW-Madison and a graduate degree in Community and Economic Development from Pennsylvania State University. She previously worked for two senators in the Wisconsin legislature and successfully shepherded bipartisan bills from drafting to being signed into law, including during split party control of the legislative and executive branch.



Tessa Conroy

Economic Development Specialist and Assistant Professor, Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics and Department of Extension, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Tessa is an Associate Professor and Economic Development Specialist at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the Department of Extension and the Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics. She earned her PhD in Economics from Colorado State University in 2014. Her research and outreach focus on regional economic growth and development with emphasis on entrepreneurship. In particular she is interested in understanding entrepreneurship among underrepresented populations and the regional economic factors that equitably enhance entrepreneurship.

