Badging the Future:
Can Digital Credentials Create Pathways to Careers and College for Today's Youth?

Speaker Biographies

Julian L. Alssid, chief workforce strategist at College for America, is a nationally recognized expert in workforce development innovation and policy. He has over 20 years of experience working with decisionmakers who seek to grow the economy and create a pipeline of skilled talent. Before joining College for America, Alssid founded the Workforce Strategy Center, where he advised over 20 states on workforce policy and established himself as a leader in promoting effective, practical solutions for implementing career pathways initiatives. Alssid has also held senior positions in education and workforce development at the Partnership for New York City, LaGuardia Community College, and the Office of the Mayor of New York City.

Don Baylor is a senior associate in the Urban Institute's Policy Advisory Group, a team of policy analysts focused on accelerating the adoption and implementation of evidence-based policymaking across Urban's portfolio. His current projects include Cities of LRNG, a multicity, youth digital-badging initiative; an assessment of JPMorgan Chase Foundation's investments in Detroit and financial capability; and an effort to create a strategic framework for state and local economic development policy in partnership with the Laura and John Arnold Foundation. From 2004 to 2014, Baylor worked at the Austin, Texas-based Center for Public Policy Priorities as a lobbyist, policy analyst, and director of Opportunity Texas, a statewide initiative to increase income and financial stability, create pathways to good jobs, and promote savings. His policy expertise includes asset building, consumer finance, postsecondary education, labor markets, and economic development. Baylor serves on the consumer advisory board for the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and is a senior adviser to the Insight Center for Community Economic Development and the United Way for Greater Austin. A former board member of the Corporation for Enterprise Development, he is also a founding board member of RAISE Texas and the Texas Match the Promise Foundation.

Leslie Beller is founder of MHA Labs and a longtime advocate for youth and collective impact, operating as entrepreneur and public sector administrator to create sustainable college, career, and life pathways. Over the last three years, Beller has managed the MHA Labs initiative from its start as a one-page rubric, through a W. K. Kellogg innovation venture, and into a successful independent cradle-to-career skills organization with thousands of users. Practicing what she preaches, Beller often uses the MHA Labs skills framework to guide herself through managing a national skills reform movement. Before launching MHA Labs, she was the program director for youth initiatives at the Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership, where she championed citywide college and career readiness initiatives.

Jamai Blivin is founder and CEO of Innovate+Educate, a nonprofit she started in 2009 to focus on education and workforce strategies to address the gaps between supply and demand in education and the workforce. Blivin enjoyed a 15-year career in the investment field, managing over $125 million in assets at the height of her career. She retired in 2001 to pursue her passion for education and underserved youth, teaching middle school in Little Rock, Arkansas, and Durham, North Carolina, from 2001 to 2006. In 2006, Blivin joined the North Carolina Technology Association, overseeing a congressional project in Robeson County. She later led work at the association's education foundation and started the Knowledge Workforce Committee in 2007.

Deborah A. Carroll is director of the DC Department of Employment Services and former interim director and past administrator for the DC Department of Human Services Economic Security Administration. After several years of clerkships and private practice, she developed expertise in health privacy, child welfare, and mental health law and practice while representing the departments of health, behavioral health, and the Philadelphia Department of Human Services from 1999 to 2003. Additionally, Carroll was legal counsel to the City of Philadelphia's Forensic Mental Health Task Force, where she coauthored a treatise on Pennsylvania's mental health commitment laws and participated in Pennsylvania's Southeast Region Forensic Mental Health Task Force. She joined the Office of the General Counsel for the DC Department of Human Services (DHS) in 2003, where she was deputy general counsel for DHS and principal attorney for the Economic Security Administration. Carroll was also acting general counsel for DHS from 2006 to 2008 before she joined the agency in 2009 to be administrator. Carroll received her BS and JD degrees from Temple University.

Jennifer Humke is the senior program officer at the MacArthur Foundation and focuses on grantmaking in civic media. Before joining the media and journalism team, she was a program officer for digital media and learning, a 10-year, $200 million initiative to reimagine learning for the digital age. She made grants to support research and design experiments to explore new approaches to learning, which culminated with the launch of Collective Shift, an organization designed to expand innovations seeded through digital media and learning. Humke helps manage the legacy phase of the digital media and learning initiative. She joined MacArthur in 2002 and was associate director for public affairs before moving to the program team. Before joining MacArthur, Humke spent three years with the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, where she was responsible for media and public outreach for exhibits, events, and fundraising campaigns. In the late 1990s, she worked for a human rights organization in Kampala, Uganda, helping run a program that trained human rights activists to identify and document gender-specific human rights abuses in war. She helped write and publish one of the first primary research reports on women and war in Uganda. She is chair of the board of Young Chicago Authors, a Chicago-based arts education nonprofit that uses writing, spoken word, and performance to cultivate youth self-expression. She previously served on the board of the Communications Network, a national nonprofit that supports using strategic communications for social good in the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors. Humke has a BA from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and an MA in international affairs and journalism from American University.

David Leaser is the senior manager of strategic initiatives for IBM's training and skills program. He developed IBM's first cloud-based learning solution and is the program developer for IBM's new Open Badge program, a leading-edge program to attract, engage, and improve talent. Leaser is the author of several thought leadership white papers on talent development, including "Migrating Minds" and "The Social Imperative in Workforce Development." Leaser has trained more than 4,000 clients and developed more than 30 training manuals and video tutorials.

Erika C. Poethig is an Institute fellow and director of urban policy initiatives at the Urban Institute. She assembles in-house experts to help local leaders draw insights from research and navigate policy challenges facing urban America in the 21st century. She also leads partnerships to develop new programs and strategies, translate research into policy and practice, and align philanthropic investments and federal policy. Before joining Urban in 2013, Poethig was acting assistant secretary for policy, development, and research at the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, where she was responsible for research, policy, and market analysis, as well as program development assistance. During her tenure in the Obama administration, she was deputy assistant secretary for policy development and was a leading architect of the White House Council for Strong Cities and Strong Communities. At the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, she was associate director for housing. She also was assistant commissioner for policy, resource, and program development at the City of Chicago's Department of Housing.

Shayne Spaulding is a senior research associate in the Income and Benefits Policy Center at the Urban Institute, where her work focuses on the evaluation of workforce development and postsecondary education programs. She has spent nearly 20 years in the workforce development field as an evaluator, technical assistance provider, and program manager. Her research has included studies of programs for young noncustodial fathers, sectoral employment programs, social-purpose staffing agencies, faith-based programs, and other workforce development topics. Before joining Urban, Spaulding was the university director of workforce development for the City University of New York (CUNY), the nation's largest public urban university system. Spaulding serves on the board of the Workforce Professionals Training Institute and the advisory board of the New York City Labor Market Information Service at the CUNY Graduate Center.

Leila Toplic leads marketing communications and partnerships for LRNG, a new movement that closes the opportunity gap and transforms how young people access and experience learning and the paths they can take to success. She oversees engagement with LRNG's diverse ecosystem of cities, nonprofits, corporations, educators, and policymakers, and implements LRNG's vision in local communities and nationally. Before joining LRNG, Toplic was vice president for marketing and partnerships at Sama Group, where she oversaw marketing communications and partnerships, as well as individual fundraising for Samasource, Samaschool, and Samahope. Before joining Sama Group, Toplic spent over 14 years leading brand and marketing strategy and programs at Microsoft and Adobe.