

# Launching Urban's Community Engagement Resource Center: Building Community Power and Institutionalizing Participatory Practices

## Speaker Biographies

**Celina Barrios-Millner** is co-vice president of the Office of Race and Equity Research at the Urban Institute, where she manages the Office's support for equity-oriented research and practice across Urban. Barrios-Millner brings 20 years of experience advancing transformational equity and inclusion strategies through the public sector. She served as senior advisor to Boston Mayor Michelle Wu and as the city's chief of equity and inclusion under Acting Mayor Kim Janey. In that role, Barrios-Millner was charged with embedding equity and racial justice into all city planning and operations and provided the equity guidance to ensure over \$500 million in federal recovery funds were allocated to communities and sectors disproportionately affected by the pandemic. She previously established the city's first Supplier Diversity program, oversaw the city's local hire policy, and helped design the city's Immigrant Advancement Agenda. Previously, she was the northeast regional director for the National Immigration Forum, led partnership development for the Massachusetts Supplier Diversity Office, and has advocated for social justice causes as a community organizer. Barrios-Millner is a graduate of American University and holds a master's degree in public policy from the Harvard Kennedy School.

**Angela Bednarek** directs the evidence project at Pew, which aims to promote and facilitate new ways that research is generated, valued, and used to address pressing challenges across a wide variety of disciplines. As director, she leads the effort to increase collaboration among funders, researchers, decision-makers, and other stakeholders to identify and advance practices that connect evidence with decision-making. For more than a decade at Pew, Bednarek developed, supported, and communicated scientific research and technical analyses to identify emerging issues, inform policy, and advance solutions to environmental problems. Before joining Pew, Bednarek was a foreign affairs officer and American Association for the Advancement of Science diplomacy fellow in the U.S. State Department's Office of Environmental Policy, a fellow at the Earth Institute at Columbia University, and a scientist at Oak Ridge National Laboratory. Bednarek holds a bachelor's degree in biology and studio art from the University of Notre Dame, a master's in biology from the University of Louisville, and a doctorate in biology from the University of Pennsylvania.

**Chhaya Kolavalli, Ph.D.**, is a senior program officer – knowledge creation and research in Entrepreneurship for the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, where she manages a portfolio directed at tracking, answering, and anticipating the most pressing challenges for entrepreneurs, entrepreneurship supporters and policymakers, as well as program staff, and internal and external partners. Prior to joining the Kauffman Foundation, Dr. Kolavalli was an assistant director at the University of Kentucky Center for Equality and Social Justice, where she developed programming that supports collaborative social justice research, which helps researchers think about their work in more community-engaged and policy-relevant ways. Earlier, Dr. Kolavalli was an editorial assistant with Human Organization, where she managed the manuscript review

process for the flagship journal in applied anthropology. Dr. Kolavalli is the author of the forthcoming book, “Well-Intentioned Whiteness: Green Urban Development and Black Resistance in Kansas City” with the University of Georgia press. Her work can be found in other publications, as well, such as *Gastronomica*, *Human Organization*, and *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*. Dr. Kolavalli has a Ph.D. in applied anthropology specializing in equitable city development, race and racism, and urban agriculture from the University of Kentucky, and a Master of Arts in cultural anthropology and Bachelor of Arts in anthropology from the University of Kansas.

**Gerri LeBeau** (she/her) is of the Two Kettle Band from the Cheyenne River reservation in north central South Dakota. She currently lives in Box Elder, South Dakota and works at the Black Hills Community Loan Fund, an Indigenous Certified Community Development Financial Institution in Rapid City. Gerri received a bachelor’s degree from Black Hills State University. She is currently part of a Community Advisory Board providing input based on her lived experience to the Office of Planning Research and Evaluation (OPRE) at the Department of Health and Human Services. She has expertise in TANF, financial help paying for child care, child support, employment and job training, and services for Native Americans.

**Teesha Miller** is assistant vice president and community affairs officer (CAO), leading the Tenth District community development team. This team executes community and economic development initiatives that address issues facing underserved communities and small businesses. Miller joined the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City in April 2021, after serving as executive director of Youth Ambassadors Inc., a Kansas City workforce and life skills development nonprofit. Before that, Miller held leadership positions in both and public and private sectors, including as director of the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program for Jackson County, Missouri, and leading departments at Children’s Mercy Hospital and St. Luke’s Health System. Miller has an undergraduate degree in management and master’s degrees in business administration and health care administration from Park University. Miller is a member of the community advisory board at the Cleaver YMCA and is a member of the Kansas City Chapter of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Incorporated. Miller also is a faculty member with the Vermont Oxford Network, an interdisciplinary health-care nonprofit that creates curricula, directs clinical trials, and utilizes data to drive desired outcomes for marginalized individuals.

**Gabrielle Newell** is committed to boosting the effectiveness and equity of our safety net services. Gabrielle’s work focuses on TANF, workforce development, and case management. She has a particular interest in innovative practices to support long-term financial stability and career growth. Prior to joining OPRE she worked as a crisis counselor and case manager with people fleeing trafficking situation with the non-profit Polaris. She holds a Bachelor’s degree in International Studies, with a minor in Human Rights, from the University of Chicago, where she was selected for the Truman Scholarship. Gabrielle has a Masters in Comparative Social Policy from the University of Oxford. Gabrielle is currently serving an assignment with ACF’s Immediate Office of the Assistant Secretary, coordinating ACF’s effort to advance equity throughout our work.

**Harlan Pruden** (Nēhiyo/First Nations Cree), works with and for the Two-Spirit community locally, nationally and internationally. Currently, Harlan is an Indigenous Knowledge Translation Lead at Chee Mamuk, an Indigenous health program at BC Centre for Disease Control and is also a co-founder of the

Two-Spirit Dry Lab, Turtle Island's first research group that exclusively focuses on Two-Spirit people, communities and/or experiences. Harlan is also the Managing Editor of the TwoSpiritJournal.com and an Advisory Member for the Canadian Institutes of Health Research's Institute of Gender and Health. Before relocating to Vancouver in 2015, Harlan was co-founder and a Director of New York City community-based organization, the NorthEast Two-Spirit Society and was a President Obama appointee to the United States Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS (PACHA) and provided advice, information, and recommendations to the Secretary of Health & Human Services and the White House. (In December 2018, Harlan was (happily) fired/dismissed from PACHA by Mr. Trump via Fedex.)

**Helen "Skip" Skipper** has been working in peer support since her release from incarceration in 2007. She has recently transitioned from senior manager of peer services at the New York City Criminal Justice Agency, where she was intentional in creating space for individuals with lived experiences, to the inaugural executive director of the NYC Justice Peer Initiative. Skip was also a community research assistant at the Urban Institute, and she continues to sit on several research initiatives representing community voices and lived experiences. A 2021-22 Beyond the Bars fellow at Columbia University, she is also a Columbia University justice-in-education scholar and studies criminal justice at St. Francis College, where she is a student representative and the first Justice Initiatives (formerly Post-Prison) program participant to have been invited to join the Honors Program. Skip was also the first peer supervisor employed by the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and was involved in the groundbreaking Friendship Benches NYC initiative, which received extensive news coverage. She lives by her mantra: "I've been around the block a time or two on my tricycle and use those lived experiences to color my world while assisting, supporting, advocating and navigating for those still caught up in the oppressive and broken criminal justice system!"

**Alisha Small** is the McNair Center scholar for economic growth. She has more than 15 years of experience as an economist with the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics measuring labor costs and employment cost trends. Her work has focused on data collection and analysis for the Employment Cost Index, Employer Costs for Employee Compensation report, Employee Benefits Survey, and the Occupational Requirements Survey. Over her career, she has interfaced with hundreds of businesses across the United States. Small is a graduate of Rice University with a double major in economics and Spanish language/linguistics. She holds a master's degree in economics from Cleveland State University, and her research interests include urban revitalization and entrepreneurship.

**William Wells, Jr.**, is founder and Executive Director of aSTEAM Village, which exists to inspire students and families to pursue education and career pathways in Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math (STEAM), through community-based project learning and innovative programs. Mr. Wells is a member of the National Society of Black Engineers, and a graduate of The Tuck School Business at Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH.