

Linking Industrial Policy Investments and Small Business Ecosystems: A Look at Western New York

Speaker Biographies

Simeon Banister, a Rochester native, began his tenure as president and CEO of Rochester Area Community Foundation on Oct. 1, 2022. Banister's career before the Foundation spanned public and private sectors and included the New York State Senate, state Department of Taxation and Finance, the State University of New York, and several private commercial real estate firms. He joined the Community Foundation in 2017 as a program officer for equity and later vice president of the Community Programs department, which oversees grantmaking and community leadership. In October 2021, Banister was named executive vice president. He took the lead in establishing the North Star Coalition, which is aligned with Urban Institute to help ensure that post-pandemic recovery dollars are used to create opportunities that will benefit historically excluded residents. Banister has been recognized for his contributions. *Rochester Business Journal* named him to the 2019 Forty Under 40 class and the Power 100 list in 2023 and 2024. He was named to *City & State New York's* first-ever Western New York Power 100 list in 2021. A graduate of North Carolina Central University and the Princeton Theological Seminary, Banister is a sought-after speaker, most recently on Rochester's history of redlining and racial inequities. For several years, he was president of the Greater Rochester Martin Luther King Jr. Commission (through 2022) and currently serves on a number of boards and committees: CEO Net, CFLeads, Congressional Award Foundation's Advisory Board, Finger Lakes Regional Economic Development Committee, Roc the Future (Treasurer), Rochester Climate Collective (Co-Chair), Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative Steering Committee (Vice Chair), Together Now, New York Funders Alliance, and University of Rochester Medical Center. Banister and his family live in Rochester.

Marnie LaVigne, PhD, is President and CEO at Launch NY. With a bachelor's degree in neuroscience and a doctorate in clinical psychology from the University of Rochester, Dr. LaVigne has spent more than 30 years in both the private and public sectors creating new products and start-up businesses. Her for profit experience includes co-founding health informatics businesses employing more than 100 people, two initial public offerings, and product development in large biomedical companies. In 2014, after heading economic development at the University at Buffalo, she became the President and CEO of Launch NY, which she co-founded in 2012 to serve high-growth potential startups in the western half of New York. Launch NY is a nonprofit venture development organization that has provided pro bono mentoring and the most active seed fund in the state to over 1600 companies. As a U.S. Treasury designated Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI), Launch NY offers specialty accelerator programs including Emerging Cleantech Opportunity Incubator and Founders Go Big for underrepresented entrepreneurs. She is past chair of the New York State Economic Development Council (NYSEDC) and a member of the boards for Impressia Bank, Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center, State Science and Technology Institute (SSTI), Upstate Venture Connect, and Western New York Venture Association.

Dominic Robinson is Senior Vice President of Inclusive Growth for the CenterState Corporation for Economic Opportunity (CenterState CEO). CenterState CEO is a regional economic development and business leadership organization and chamber of commerce, based in Syracuse and representing Central Upstate New York. In this role he is responsible for driving positive impact and outcomes in the region. Robinson oversees the majority of the organization's direct programs, services and initiatives, including core areas of business expansion, retention and attraction; business incubation and acceleration (including The Tech Garden); workforce development; community investment and prosperity; and cluster development. Robinson previously served as the organization's vice president of Economic Inclusion.

Dominic previously served as Vice President of Economic Inclusion for the CenterState Corporation for Economic Opportunity. In this role, he engaged area employers in addressing issues of poverty, economic disparity, and urban blight. Dominic oversaw a portfolio of programs, including the Northside Urban Partnership (a neighborhood revitalization initiative), “Work Train” (an employer-led workforce development platform), and Up Start (a business incubation and development program, targeting minority and neighborhood-based entrepreneurs). Dominic began his career as a high school teacher and football coach and then as a community organizer. In 2006, he co-founded a neighborhood revitalization initiative on Syracuse’s “Northside”, which evolved into the Northside Urban Partnership (Northside UP), an entity sponsored by CenterState CEO, St. Joseph’s Health and Catholic Charities of Onondaga County. Dominic lives in Syracuse, New York with his wife, Jonnell, and their two children, Ila and Owen. He’s originally from Los Angeles, California.

Brett Theodos is a senior fellow and director of the Community Economic Development Hub at the Urban Institute. His work focuses on economic and community development, neighborhood change, affordable homeownership, consumer finance, and program evaluation and learning. His research includes evaluations of the Economic Development Administration, New Markets Tax Credit, Small Business Administration loan and investment programs, Opportunity Zones, and the US Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Choice Neighborhoods, Community Development Block Grant, and Section 108 programs. He is studying how capital flows (or fails to flow) into communities, including the role of mission finance actors like community development financial institutions. He leads projects researching how entrepreneurs can access capital. Theodos has conducted studies of neighborhood change and geographic mobility. He is evaluating several place-based initiatives. He’s led studies of affordable homeownership supports, including shared equity models like community land trusts. In the financial capability space, he’s led studies of financial coaching, financial curriculum, and rules of thumb for decisionmaking. He’s explored the geography of debt. Theodos is working to grow nonprofit capacity in performance measurement. He directs Measure4Change, which provides technical assistance and facilitates a community of practice for nonprofits and has led randomized controlled trial evaluations of youth workforce and education preparedness programs. Theodos serves on the Board of the Center for Community Progress, the Douglass Community Land Trust, and the Housing Authority of Prince George’s County. Theodos received his BA from Northwestern University, MPP from Georgetown University, and PhD in public policy from George Washington University.

Marco Villegas is a Program Officer at JPMorgan Chase Global Philanthropy covering Upstate New York, New York City, and Northern and Central New Jersey. Prior to joining JPMorgan Chase, Marco was preserving and developing affordable housing in the Bronx, NY and Dallas, Texas with Encima Neighborhood Development, which he co-founded. Marco also has Strategy Consulting experience at Accenture and Equity Research experience at JP Morgan Chase covering the Specialty Finance industry. Marco holds a BA from NYU, Stern School of Business and an MBA from the Wharton School.