

Unlocking Black Prosperity: Advancing Wealth through Small Businesses, Asset Development, and Community Investment

Speaker Biographies

Kimberly Burrowes is a training and technical assistance senior manager in the Research to Action Lab at the Urban Institute. Burrowes's research has focused on advancing racial equity in parks and public spaces, practices and policies for affordable housing solutions, and participatory engagement. Burrowes thinks about how to provide an equity framing to local policy solutions for the built environment, using placemaking and community engagement tools. Within her technical assistance role, Burrowes works with local government agencies and nonprofits to build their capacity to tackle policy challenges. She has advised local agencies on the equity impacts of placemaking, community-based nonprofits focused on housing stability and equity, county-level criminal justice system agencies, and most recently, resident engagement approaches for municipalities exploring financial empowerment plans. Burrowes has a BA in geography and international development and an MA in community development and urban planning from Clark University.

LesLeigh Ford is an associate director at the Urban Institute, where she leads and contributes to research and policy advising projects that explore sources of and solutions to racial, gender, and class-based inequities. Ford is the practice area lead for the Center for Equity and Community Impact. She has led research on such topics as diversifying the health care workforce, expanding the Black maternal health workforce, improving access to leadership development programs for leaders of color, and reparations for Black Americans. Her previous work also includes evaluations of philanthropic and government-funded grant programs and research and advising to inform funder decisionmaking and practice. Ford currently leads a body of work that focuses on advancing wealth equity, and she recently launched the Black Family Thriving Initiative, a program of research designed to examine the role of wealth and wealth building for Black middle-class Americans. Ford earned a bachelor's degree in political science and English from the University of Michigan, a master's degree in education policy and management from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and a doctoral degree in sociology from Duke University.

Andre Fowlkes has been implementing innovation driven economic development models for the past fifteen years, through a venture development organization he co-founded called Start Co. As President of Start Co. Fowlkes oversees and manages sales and business development, corporate and government engagement, smart cities activity, civic innovation efforts, and resource cultivation. Under Fowlkes' leadership Start Co. has seen exponential growth not just in startups and new innovations but also in new processes, systems, and capital instruments for ecosystem growth. Before Start Co. Fowlkes spent a decade in the capital markets, most recently at Fisher Investments. Today, Fowlkes brings extensive experience in building new and unconventional partnerships to assist in the brokering of technology, talent, and capital for economic growth. He leads the charge at Start Co. to build and operate new programs and resources for the inclusion of minorities and women, students, and social organizations. He directly supports Start Co. companies by serving as an Executive in Residence.

Harsha Mallajosyula takes pride in helping mission-driven organizations build up their technology and data stack. He brings more than 15 years of private and public-sector experience, including most recently as the Chief Data Officer in Paterson, New Jersey. In his role as Data Director for the BWDC, Harsha leads a team focused on aggregating available data from national, state, and local sources and making it as

accessible as possible through data clean-ups and visualizations. Harsha earned a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University in Hyderabad, India as well as master's degrees from the University of Idaho and the University of California-Berkeley and a fellowship in leadership and public policy from Harvard University.

Noah McDaniel is a research associate in the Housing and Communities Division at the Urban Institute. His work focuses on community and economic development, with experience in federal small business policy, community development finance, and neighborhood investment flows. His other broad areas of interest include state and local governance, land use, and applied microeconomics. He holds both a bachelor of science degree and a master's degree in city planning from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Michael Neal is a senior fellow and practice area lead in the Housing Finance Policy Center at the Urban Institute. He is also a research director and researcher with the Initiative on Land, Housing and Property Rights at Boston College Law School. Neal's research covers wealth building, with a focus on housing and the financial and broader economic systems that support it. His work focuses on the mechanisms that exclude certain communities from homeownership and broader wealth-building opportunity. At Urban, Neal is part of the William and Gail Gorham Scholar/Analyst Program and a Gorham Mentor, class of 2025. He is also a Harry Hatry award winner for mentorship, a former equity scholar, and a former recipient of a President's Award for Communications Innovation. Neal is also a JPMorgan Chase fellow and a member of the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency's Homeownership Working Group for Project REACH. He also serves on the technical data advisory committee for the Black Wealth Data Center and on the HBCU Wealth Building Initiative Advisory Board. Neal has a bachelor's degree in economics from Morehouse College and a master's degree in public administration from the University of Pennsylvania. He also studied economics at St. Catherine's College at the University of Oxford and finance in the Graduate School of Princeton University.

Christina Prinvil is a research analyst in the Center for Nonprofits and Philanthropy at the Urban Institute, where she engages in quantitative and qualitative research. Before joining Urban, Prinvil was a research consultant for the Haitian Advocacy Working Group, the Immigration Hub, and Stateside Associates. In her past roles, she created end-to-end development of client work products and presentations, such as root-cause and gap analysis, findings and recommendation reports, and strategic plans. Before being a research consultant, Prinvil worked at the World Justice Project, where she provided research on access to justice and technology, including the production of data checks, report writing, and the drafting of publications. She has produced policy research and analysis as a fellow for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and an emerging leader for the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation. As a graduate student, Prinvil studied the inequitable distribution of resources that often leads to disparities in disadvantaged communities. She has a track record of using her skills in quantitative and qualitative research to provide data-driven recommendations. Prinvil holds a BS in political science and economics from the University of Florida and an MPP from the George Washington University.

Ellen Shepard is CEO of Community Allies (communityallies.net), a Chicago-based firm working nationally to build more equitable local economies and uplift BIPOC- and locally-owned businesses. In dozens of cities, she has helped to create ecosystems and coalitions of business support organizations, lenders, funders, and policymakers, enabling them to amplify their impact by aligning around common visions and strategies. Community Allies' work is especially focused on uniting disparate organizations across past divides of power, geography, and race. Recent projects include an eight-city assessment of small business

ecosystems to address disparities for business owners of color, standing up the San Antonio small business ecosystem coalition, strategic planning for the Chicago Community Loan Fund, and supporting the California statewide CDFI coalition in honing its purpose and governance for greater impact. Ellen is the former executive director of Chicago's Andersonville Chamber of Commerce and Development Corporation, where she helped to pioneer the local living economies movement.

Brett Theodos, PhD, directs the Local Finance and Growth practice at the Urban Institute. Dr. Theodos is a leading researcher in mission finance, wealth-building, place-based development, and small business outcomes. Dr. Theodos serves on the Board of the Housing Authority of Prince George's County MD and the Center for Community Progress, and was a founding board member of the Douglass Community Land Trust.